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Science Fiction & Fantasy

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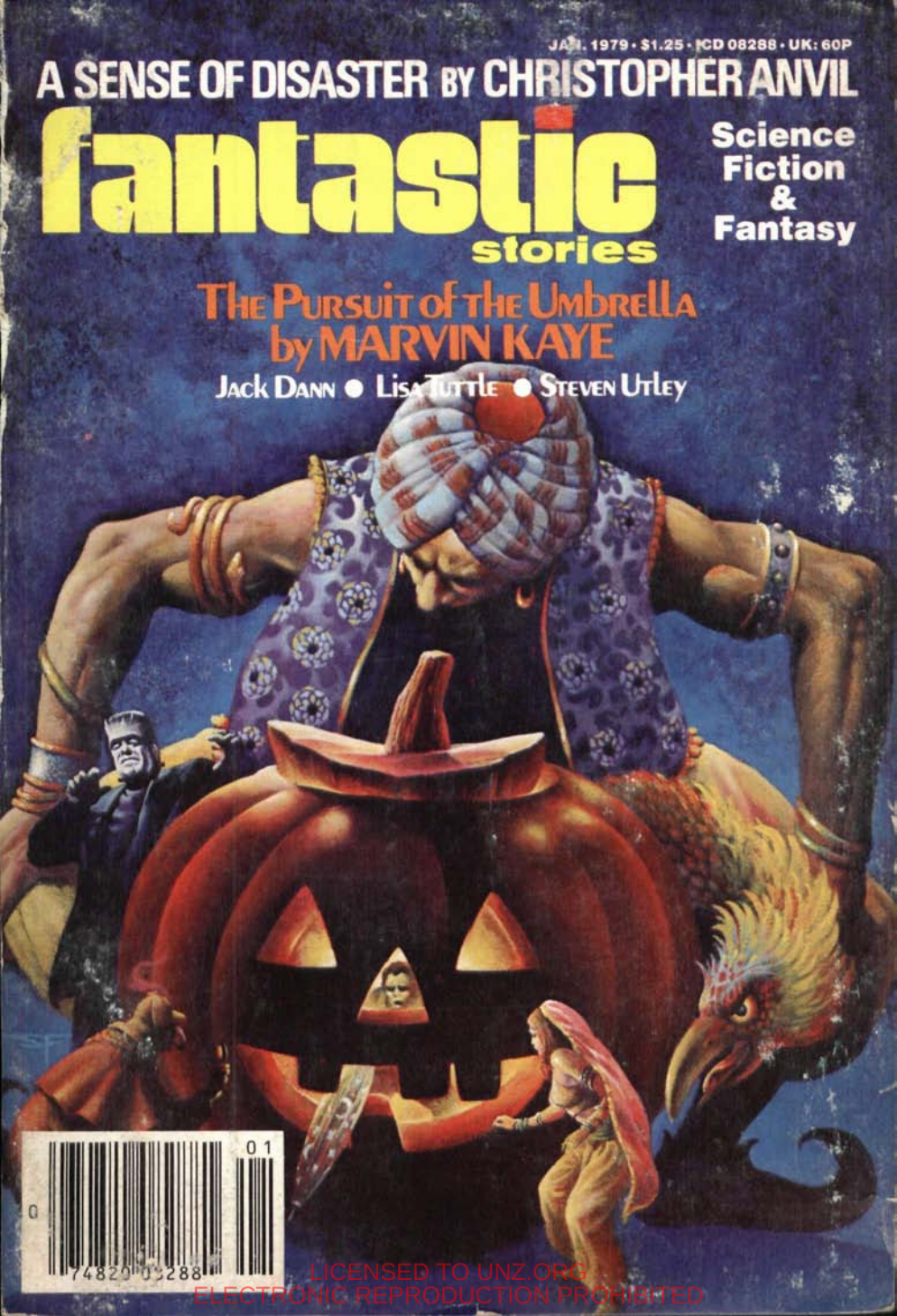
JACK DANN • LISA TUTTLE • STEVEN UTLEY



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JANUARY, 1979 Vol. 27, No. 4

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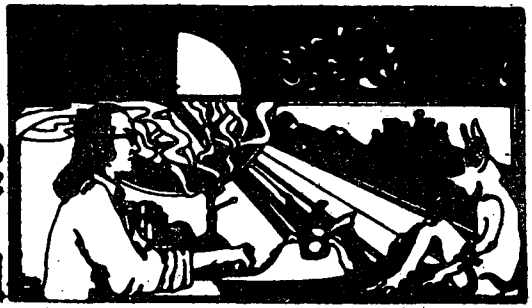

TED WHITE editorial

THE BRAIN VS. THE BODY: I would really rather not prolong unnecessarily the ongoing debate over *Star Wars*—by the time you read this it will be almost a year and a half since its release—but a letter from reader Richard Krueger brings up several related points which *do* deserve further exploration.

Dear Mr. White,

With your permission, I'd like to offer my own thoughts/opinions on the "Star Wars Editorial Controversy".

First, I agree with your *cerebral* opinion of the movie and your view of George Lucas as possessing a Flash Gordon perception of SF. I recently read an interview with the *Star Wars* sound effects man which corroborates your thought. When talking about why the film has sound in space, the sound effects man quotes Lucas as saying, "Look, it's five million years ago and in another part of the universe. We can do anything we want." This "we made the rules—we can change them" philosophy definitely rubs me the wrong way, intellectually.

However, I saw the movie twice and enjoyed it both times! Why? Mainly because I took the movie on its own terms. The key to enjoying *Star Wars* is to leave your literary and intellectual inhibitions at home. The appeal it to the gut, not the head, and if you can't disconnect one from the other at times, I feel sorry for you. Jules Feiffer once said comic books are "there to be nothing else but liked". This, I feel, is the major factor in *SW*'s success: it's to be liked, but not surgically dissected.

Another thing: who are you to tell fandom, in effect, "You're a bunch of unthinking schleps if you like that movie"? You seem to feel that if you can't enjoy anything that doesn't involve brain salad surgery (with apologies to Emerson, Lake & Palmer) no one else can and/or should. This approach only alienates the people you try to reach; as a result, they won't listen to your worth-while statements. (To me, your attitude sounds suspiciously like the Simple Good vs. Simple Evil pattern you claim to detest.)

So, unless you can detach brain from emotion—something SF authors seem terrified of doing—you're not going to enjoy *Star Wars*, or a typical American hard rock band, or even one of the shorter Conan stories. SF and Fantasy authors seem to look down their noses at gaudier, less "mature" story forms that try to make a comeback. Would that they possessed

(cont. on page 121)

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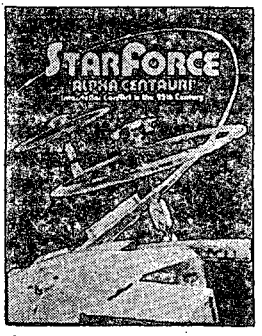

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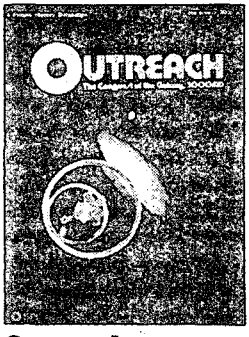

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We met for the first time J. Adrian Fillmore (gad!) and his magical umbrella in Marvin Kaye's "The Incredible Umbrella" (February, 1976)—and in that first story we followed Fillmore into a Gilbert & Sullivan universe in which people broke into song at the least opportunity and were accompanied by unseen heavenly choirs. In "The Flight of the Umbrella" (June, 1977) we followed Fillmore into other literary universes, including those of Dracula and Sherlock Holmes. Now we rejoin him, still in Holmes' universe, as, once more, he takes up—

THE PURSUIT OF THE UMBRELLA

MARVIN KAYE

"

• • • A LONG, heavy pole that ended in a large flounce of some silky material emblazoned with orange-and-yellow stripes on which various cabalistic symbols seemed to dance in pastel figurations. It was clearly an umbrella, but its size was rather impractical: too large for everyday use, too small for beach-basking . . .

When the former J. Adrian Fillmore (Gad, how he detested that name!) bought the strange bumbershoot, he had no idea it was a dimensional transfer-engine. It whisked him away from his prosaic routine as professor of English literature, American drama and Shakespeare at Parker College to various "literary" worlds, including those of Gilbert and Sullivan, Sherlock Holmes and Count Dracula. During his adventures, he ran afoul of the infamous Professor Moriarty and his nefarious henchman, A.I. Persano, a fearsomely gifted swordsman.

First dumping Persano into a nightmarish world full of literary horrors, Fillmore proceeded to Reichenbach Falls in time to rescue Sherlock Holmes from the umbrella's original inventor, Professor Moriarty. The kingpin of crime fell into the torrent screaming, clutching the incredible umbrella and bearing it away, apparently stranding the poor teacher in Holmes' world for good.

DURING HIS ADVENTURES with the umbrella, J. Adrian Fillmore (Gad!) discovered several apparent laws governing the instrument:

1. Once arriving in a literary world, one could not excape until working out a "sequence," that is, an adventure along the lines of the author on whose works the world seemed based. Thus in the Gilbert and Sullivan world, Fillmore's entanglements resembled the plot of a comic opera, even to the extent

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

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of accompanying music from some unseen divine orchestra.

2. It was possible to activate the umbrella by putting one's life in such danger that there was no chance of the adventure continuing. Thus, to escape Dracula, Fillmore jumped out of a window, simultaneously pushing the umbrella-catch. It took him to another world immediately.
3. The flight of the umbrella depended on the thoughts of the operator at the time the button was pushed, BUT—
4. By a kind of principle of universal economy, if the user escaped a world before finishing off all entanglements in it, the umbrella was liable to pervert its flight to some world in which a similar set of problems might be waiting for the hapless traveler.
5. In Gilbert and Sullivan-land, Fillmore nearly found himself permanently stuck there. Each world seemingly could trap the traveler if he participated too actively in its business. Thus, in the comic opera place, singing like the natives almost glued the professor there permanently. Other worlds might be more subtle in their dangers of subsumption.

WHEN Sherlock Holmes heard about the umbrella, he set Fillmore straight on how it must operate.

"You have been thinking about it backwards," said Holmes. "If it seems to take you to literary worlds, that is surely because you are a literature professor. The thing operates on mental patterns. And those worlds surely do not exist because they were written about on your original earth. Instead, the fiction with which you are familiar must consist of notions and conceptions telepathically borrowed across the barriers of the dimensions. Your artists may unwittingly tap the logical premises of parallel worlds.

"As for various rules you think govern the umbrella: subsumption, completing a sequence, and so on—I am not at all convinced that they are inevitable. But they are, collectively, a three-pipe problem and I am weary."

So the two went to sleep for the night. On the morrow, Holmes planned to let Watson think he died at the falls, too, and then start his sojourn as the "explorer Sigerson." Fillmore intended to change his name to James Phillimore and accompany Holmes on his travels.

Mr. James Phillimore eagerly awaited the morrow and the beginning of a new, exciting life . . .

Chapter One

MR. JAMES PHILLIMORE sat in an overstuffed chair at 221B Baker Street and grumbled to himself about the hyperbolized attractions of High Romance.

"Odd," he groused, "to be bored to death thirty-seven years before one's birth."

Watson's ship's-clock ticked away the tedium. The scholar was alone. In one hand he held a strong whiskey-and-soda. His other hand smoothed the latest copy of a London daily across his knees.

He was looking for a job.

"Damn and double-damn! They all want references!"

Without capital, Doyle's London was no great delight. Holmes was away, Watson didn't know he existed,

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and Mrs. Hudson had a great plenty of prattle with little admixture of matter therein. Phillimore was bored and broke. So long as he stayed at 221B, he was welcome to share the landlady's larder, since Mycroft Holmes kept up his brother's rent at Sherlock's devisement. However, a protracted stay at Holmes' digs was decidedly inadvisable, the professor knew.

Everything had gone awry. Originally, Phillimore was to purchase false papers and fashion a new identity, but Holmes, never the most organized of men when he wasn't on a case, kept forgetting to make the necessary arrangements. Then the grand plan to accompany the detective on his Tibetan perambulations was scotched in an odd manner.

It seems that Holmes' cousin, Professor George Edward Challenger, was about to sail to South America to search for traces of sentient prehistoric life on that continent. Holmes was asked to come along. Delighted at the prospect, he was yet afraid to let it be known he was still alive for fear the Moriarty survivors would wreak vengeance on the entire expedition. So instead of assuming the false identity of Sigerson, Holmes made special arrangement to impersonate a genuine world explorer, Lord John Roxton, an individual whose presence in the Challenger team would hardly excite suspicion.*

The detective extended an invitation to Phillimore to come along as well, but the scholar, having read Doyle's *The Lost World*, decided he would prefer estivating in London to possibly furnishing himself as an *hors d'oeuvre* for a teratosaurus. Against Holmes' better judgement, Phillimore remained behind.

"But do not tarry long in Baker Street," the detective said before starting out. "Moran saw you upon the Reichenbach ledge. He won't forget you. I have sources which tell me he is temporarily out of London, but I also have ascertained he will return by the end of the month."

This allowed the scholar a scant week to assiduously search the dailies for employment opportunities . . . but to no avail. He had no past, therefore there was no way to satisfy the strict scruples of the Victorian educational system.

Time was running out. So was his money. Without his umbrella, he felt trapped.

A low tap sounded at the door. Phillimore bade the tapper enter. The gray-haired landlady walked in bearing a silver tray on which rested an envelope embossed with an official-looking crest.

"It was brought a moment ago," she said, proffering the tray. Silently marveling at the London postal system which guaranteed upwards of ten deliveries a day, the professor picked up the envelope and saw his name neatly inscribed on it.

"Strange," he murmured. "Who else knows of my existence?"

The landlady shrugged, unable to advance a viable theory.

He withdrew a single folded sheet of cream-colored paper, smoothed it out and read the terse message thereupon . . .

> IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE DISCUSS THE UMBRELLA. PLEASE CALL AT MY CLUB THIS EVENING.
>
> M.H.

The address was inked beneath the initials. "Hmm," Phillimore mused,

*Further details are available in Chapter Five of the author's *The Historionic Holmes* (Luther Norris, 1971).

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"perhaps the game's afoot. . ."

Chapter Two

As he stepped out upon Baker Street, the professor debated whether to walk or hail a hansom. Since it was a warm, pleasant evening, he decided to apply shank's-mare toward Pall Mall.

As he strode briskly along, Phillimore mused on the import of the note. What was there to discuss? The umbrella was gone for good, borne off by the death grip of Moriarty, lying at the base of the Reichenbach torrent.

"Well, as Holmes would say, it's foolish to speculate with insufficient data. When I reach the club, I'll find out." The opportunity was too good to miss, in any event: a meeting with the one person even more brilliant than Sherlock Holmes.

Approaching his destination from the St. James' end, he stopped at a door some little distance from the Carlton. Upon stepping through the portal, Phillimore entered a club that was reputed to be the oddest in London. He followed a short hall to a glass panel through which he observed a large, luxurious chamber in which a great many men sat reading periodicals, determinedly preserving an elaborate communal silence.

A melancholy retainer accepted his card and bade the teacher wait in the visitors' room, just off the hall. It was a carpeted chamber with the suffused light of a fireplace to offset the gloom. Phillimore sank into a comfortable overstuffed chair and awaited his summoner.

That individual was not tardy in coming. Before very long, a heavy footfall announced the arrival of a large, florid newcomer. The man was positively obese, but his face, though massive, still reflected keen intelligence. Yet the peculiarly watery-gray eyes held a far-off look, the expression of a dreamer.

He extended a broad flipper and shook Phillimore's hand, saying, "I am pleased to meet you, sir. Sherlock has related your incredible adventures to me."

"And I take it that you are able to countenance the possibility of an engine which transfers the user to other dimensions?"

"Oh, I should say so," the large man wheezed. "I have bethought myself of such a device for quite some time. However, I am the most indolent individual in England, and I never botherd to follow the notion to its practical conclusion. It should have meant wearisome computations, hypotheses, trails and trials, mistrials and counter-trials. But had I inherited Sherlock's penchant for induction, I would have postulated the likelihood of Moriarty conceiving and following through the identical concept."

The melancholy retainer reappeared and accepted their preferences in libation. After he left, Phillimore placed his fingers against one another, steeple-fashion, and spoke.

"I take it then that you are capable of explaining precisely how the umbrella works. It appears to modulate to the brain-pattern of each user, that much I have understood."

"Well, I haven't examined the Moriarty model, but I doubt it could vary greatly. The engine draws on cosmic power sources through the attuning of the individual's mental pattern. When a destination is decided on, the thoughts affix the frequency the device must seek out."

Phillimore held up his hand. "But if it is completely governed by the operator's mental patterns, why have

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I not been taken precisely where I wish every time I use it? And why must I finish a sequence? And how could it allow me to become subsumed in—"

"Now, now," the other rumbled, "*festina lente*, my good man: one point at a time. In order to fully control the umbrella, you must first totally manage your own thoughts. Self-control is a rare commodity, sir; can you truly profess that you were in charge of your facilities when the engine whisked you to that place you label a 'draft world?' Were you not distracted by the imminence of the over-amorous Ruth?"

"Indeed I was."

"You see, then? You feared you would not escape her and at the same time, you pressed the umbrella-catch, hoping to visit the world of Sherlock Holmes and myself. The umbrella, by a sort of law of universal economy, always aims to consume the least quantity of energy possible. When it sensed your muddled thoughts, it interpreted them by a destination which must have drawn on less energy than *this* world. The result: you were taken to a place on which reside analogous individuals to Ruth and Sherlock."

"And I had a devil of a time getting off again."

"That," the large man said, waving a flipper, "is another matter. There is no reason why a sequence, as you call it, must be completed. True, the engine is unlikely to work after usage until certain energy sources are redistributed and equalized, but within a day or two, at most, I should think—"

"No, I tell you I tried it repeatedly! The umbrella only operated for me in that draft-world when it seemed my life was over there, not before . . ."

A moment of silence. The big man sat and pondered, his lips working in and out. Then his eyebrows raised and he uttered a surprised, "Ahh!"

Before Phillimore could divine his host's latter thought, the retainer reappeared with a whisky-and-soda for him and a decanter of Tokay for the large man. They pledged one another's health and sipped in silence.

At length, the big man rumbled, "Your Achilles' heel would seem to be your sense of structure."

"I don't follow your meaning."

"You are a literary professor, a scholar of artificial worlds. Where but in fiction may one find an ordering of events such as pale existence cannot hope to imitate?"

"You are saying that my artistic sense dictated my adventures?"

"Precisely! The recharged umbrella read your inner thoughts and saw you were attuned to 'completing a sequence.' My dear Phillimore, this is totally consistent with the device's adaptation to the user's mental patterns."

The professor stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Subsumption, therefore, would appear to be similarly explicable."

"Indeed so. You could have traveled by umbrella any time you wished, if you had been aware of these factors. But self-ordering is no simple business, you see."

Nodding, Phillimore downed his drink and gestured to the passing retainer for a refill. "What a shame," he sighed, "to learn all this when it is of no practical use. The umbrella is gone for good."

"*I have my doubts.*"

Phillimore glanced up sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I ask you to cast your mind back to the struggle upon the ledge. Describe for me, the precise physical at-

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titude of Moriarty as he plunged into the torrent."

Mystified, Phillimore complied, sketching the verbal picture as best he could recall: the flailing limbs, the scream of terror, Moriarty toppling backwards into the boiling cascade, snatching desperately at the umbrella . . .

"*Oh, no!*"

"I fear the same, sir! If Moriarty invented the umbrella, is it not probable that he would have activated it to save his life?"

"Then somewhere, on some outpost world, he may, even now, be constructing his evil schemes."

"It is quite conceivable," the large man agreed. "Who knows what alien powers he may be marshalling preparatory to reinvading his native London?"

"Dreadful," Phillimore shuddered. "But what may we do about it?"

"Sherlock was too exhilarated over the demise of his arch-foe to consider any alternative possibilities. Thus he is not in England and I fear it shall be some time before he returns. So it is up to us. But my girth ill suits me for strenuous physical activity. . .so it devolves upon you to execute a plan of my devisement."

"Which is?"

"To pursue Moriarty and reclaim your umbrella."

The professor sputtered. "That's impossible."

The large man ignored him. "At the very least, loss of the umbrella will delay Moriarty, hopefully until Sherlock can take a hand in this. At best, he might be on some unyielding world where a paucity of certain natural resources would render it impossible for him to build a new umbrella-engine."

Phillimore was on his feet, glass in hand. "But see here, your theories are fine, but how the deuce may they be acted upon? First of all, I have no umbrella. Secondly, if I did, how would I have any idea where to seek in a multiplicity of cosmoses?"

Setting his glass on a tray, the large man sat back and cradled his paunch in clasped hands. His lips worked in and out for a few seconds, then he fixed Phillimore with a keen gaze. "I will address your first point: the absence of an umbrella. Observe my hands." He stretched them out so they were side by side, palms upward. "Let us consider my left hand to by *this* world, the one of the original Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes. Let us also conceive my right hand to be the so-called 'draft-world' you visited, a place where you found that villainous Persano and heard of one Sherrinford Holmes. On this 'draft-world' "—here he waggled his right hand for emphasis—" there also lived a Professor Moriarty, according to Persano's report. Call him the Ür-Moriarty, if you will. Now it appears as if the umbrella you lost was originally stolen from the Ür-Moriarty. If such is true . . ."

"Of course!" Phillimore exclaimed. "Then *our* Moriarty, the one who went over Reichenbach, is likely to have his own umbrella!"

"Precisely! If by good fortune he had not yet invented one, then he is, in truth, a corpse at the base of the torrent. But if he did create a dimensional transfer-engine, then it is likely to be hidden in his now-vacant headquarters. Seek it there, Phillimore, by all means, seek it there!"

The scholar quaffed the last of his whiskey-and-soda, then set the glass down. "I suppose there is no harm in doing that much at least. It would be reassuring to possess a means of

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egress from this particular island earth. But as to seeking Moriarty elsewhere. . . .I still do not see how it is possible. I suppose I could affix my thoughts on the evil professor, but that might merely fetch me to some place where the Ür-Moriarty has gone. For that matter, there could be dozens of Moriartys on a myriad of quasi-earths!"

The large man rose and put one broad paw around Phillimore's shoulders. "Have no doubts upon this latter consideration. I have an excellent theory as to how you may determine the 'real' Moriarty's whereabouts. . . ".

The time would come when Phillimore recalled these works of assurance with some little pique.

Chapter Three

FAR OFF, a clock tolled midnight. The pale moon, partially obscured by black clouds, shed a sickly glare that glimmered on the surface of the nearby Thames.

Creeping around the side of the gloomy mansion. Phillimore stepped carefully, wishing he could have found a dark-lantern amongst the clutter of Holmes' untidy catchall closet of implementa, old files and disguise components. He yearned for the familiarity of a compact, comprehensible flashlight; instead he was saddled with a battered, rusty lantern with broken shuttering. Because of the latter liability, he did not dare employ the thing till he was inside Moriarty's lair.

Rounding a corner, he walked toward the rear entrance, testing each window along the way. But everything was shut up tight.

It was a vast, ugly pile without concession to aesthetic ornamentation. At the squat, solid-looking back door, Phillimore removed certain tools and began worrying at the lock. Before setting out, he'd studied one of Holmes' myriad monographs, a slim manuscript concerned with the intricacies of lock-picking. This knowledge, bolstered by the teacher's rusty conjuring lore, enabled him to make reasonable short work of the back portal. He was a bit surprised how relatively easy the job was, but Moriarty probably never expeceted anyone to be so foolhardy as to burglarize his unsancturay.

Having achieved ingress, Phillimore lit the lantern and looked around. The interior contradicted the baleful aspect of the outside: the flickering light hinted at expensive furnishings, thick carpeting, paintings, tapestries and armorial artifacts. Luxuriance everywhere, even to the point of decadence.

He listened intently. Nothing. Not a sound. The big house was chilly and still. The only noise was the suspiration of his rapid breathing which he could not control.

The size of Moriarty's mansion daunted him. Where in all its shadowy eyries was he to seek out another umbrella whose existence, anyway, was purely hypothetical?

On the latter point, he soon was to be reassured, but for the moment he confined himself to trying to locate the library.

His conspirator had reasoned thus: as Phillimore's own dimensional adventures depended on the literature with which he was most familiar, it was conceivable that when Moriarty plunged over the falls, he chose a place to fly via umbrella that derived from his own leisure reading. Theoretically, then, Phillimore might trace the evil professor just by studying his bookshelves.

He stepped forward, a few inches

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at a time, playing the light across the floor to see where it was safe to put his feet, occasionally lofting the lantern to study the direction in which he was headed. Soon, his perambulations brought him to a wide peaked archway through which he spied a globe so enormous he could not hope to encircle its girth with outstretched arms.

Reasoning a globe would be kept in a study/library, he entered, shining the lantern about the chamber. He saw tables butted against the walls, surfaces strewn with charts and sheets of jottings. The walls themselves held graphs and maps, some of the latter depicting London, with black stickpins thrust through at various locations. At the far side of the room stood a polished teak desk that bore a neat array of papers, ledgers, writing instruments and miscellaneous calculatory paraphernalia. An amply decantered sideboard completed the roll-call of movable furniture. Behind it, set into the wall, rose a tall, moderately wide bookshelf.

Phillimore stepped across the room, rested the lantern atop the sideboard and scanned the volumes jamming the shelves.

"Hmmph. As I expected. . .mainly scientific works. Some philosophy. Nietzsche—no small testament to Moriarty's percipience, few enough sold in the original German editions. *Tertium Organum*. Kant. Schopenhauer. Paracelsus. *De Rerum Natura*. Kepler. Albertus Magnus. *Principia Mathematica*. Alhazred. *The Discoverie of* —"

The murmured soliloquy ceased. His eye backtracked to the Russel-Whitehead tomes. "Just a moment! *Principia Mathematica*. . .they didn't see that in print till about 1910, and even then it was only the initial volume!"

It was clearly an anachronism. Suddenly, Phillimore no longer regarded the notation as remote that Moriarty might have an umbrella stashed somewhere in the house. He scanned the books with renewed fervor: Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Villon in French jostled for space with great piles of political tracts and mouldering esoterica on every subject from thaumaturgy, kheft and culling. . .

There! On a shelf just above eye level he found a scant collection of fiction. The fat Burton translation of *The Arabian Nights* stood beside and dwarfed Abbott's amusing tale of life in a two-dimensional universe, *Flatland*. Here were both 1818 and 1831 editions of *Frankenstein*, as well as the endless, lurid *Newgate Calendar*, appropriately accompanied by *The Beggar's Opera* libretto and Fielding's exercise in sustained irony, *Johnathan Wild*. The only other thing on the shelf was a thick pile of sheets laboriously handwritten in German. On the top page, Phillimore noticed a vaguely familiar place name, the Rue d'Auseil. But it was no time for idle browsing.

"Must jot down the titles," he said to himself, rummaging through his pockets for paper and—

"*May I be of assistance?*"

He whirled, stunned. A shadowy figure, nearly six feet tall, stood in the doorway.

It was bad enough to be surprised in a master criminal's home at midnight during an act of burglary, but the fact that he recognized the newcomer made it all quite a bit worse. There was no mistaking the hard, lean jawline; the unblinking eyes, the mouth set in a grin that might easily be assessed as cruel. Lofting the lantern, he saw, sure enough, the deep

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lateral slice that creased the bridge of the man's nose.

"Perhaps you might like to tell me what you are doing here," suggested A.I. Persano mildly.

The scholar's thoughts raced. *Enough light to see, but he doesn't recognize me, I'm sure of it! Why not?*

The answer immediately struck him. He'd met Persano, Moriarty's lieutenant, in the "draft-world" and left him in a world of horror from which there could be no escape. *Then that must have been an Ür-Persano, and this one is the genuine article!*

"It is, you must admit, a peculiar hour to pay a social call, let alone browse through a library." Like the other Persano, the dangerous gentleman spoke politely, never flaunting his puissance in vulgar display.

Phillimore cleared his throat. *Think fast!* "I trust you are Mr. Persano?"

The other's eyes narrowed. "Perhaps. Why do you ask?"

"Well, the —ah, the fact is—"

"One of our ablest dramatists," Persano interrupted, "has stated that the phrase, 'the fact is—', invariably signifies the imminent commission of a spectacular lie. However, do not let me stay your story."

Phillimore resolved to fabricate a history not totally removed from the truth. "Professor Moriarty told me to seek you out."

"In the middle of the night?"

"He suggested you would be able to bring me his special umbrella."

Persano smiled. "It must be quite special to do him any good at the base of Reichenbach."

"He did not fall to his death. By a strange rent in the fabric of time, he was propelled to the world which I have been inhabiting until recently. There he had me create another umbrella and sent me here to bring the original, which he says is a far superior model."

"An interesting story," Persano remarked. "Why did he not return for it himself?"

Phillimore silently cudgeled his brains. *The story's full of holes. What do I tell him?*

"You see," he improvised, "when I met him, he was in prison; I was just about to be released. He dictated the plans for making an umbrella; I made one and arrived just outside the house. But it was a flimsy affair, it didn't survive the trip, I threw it in Thames." *There! Fast and fancy!*

Persano nodded sagely. "Ah, yes, I see. . .very plausible." He smiled pleasantly. "You wait right here. I'll fetch the Professor's original umbrella." Before Phillimore could say another word, Persano retreated through the archway, closing the double doors and locking them.

"Damn! He doesn't believe me," the teacher said to himself, casting about for some means of escape. But the study was an interior chamber lacking windows. His mind clicked off alternatives, saw only one possibility. "I've got to get hold of the umbrella, press its button and quit this world. But where should I go?"

He spun around to the bookshelf and desperately studied the choices. "Where would Moriarty be likely to choose? *Let's see . . .*"

Persano's footsteps sounded overhead. Evidently the need for silence no longer concerned him, a fact which subtly disconcerted Phillimore. He studied the book titles intently, weighing possibilities.

"Surely Moriarty would go someplace that offered the opportunity for criminous expansion. In which case—"

The footsteps started downstairs as

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he flipped throught the pages of *The Newgate Calendar*, found what he wanted and replaced the tome. "Yes. He even has the chapter heading underlined: 'Johnathan Wild, The Prince of Robbers.' Doyle drew the obvious analogy; Wild was a Sixteenth Century Moriarty. He banded all burglars and highwaymen under a common government, his own. . ."

The lock clicked.

"But would Moriarty choose to horn in on Wild or would he hit upon one of the fictional characters based on Wild? What advantage would there be in each?"

He terminated his mutterings as the doors opened and Persano stepped through carrying two objects, a large black umbrella devoid of decorative device and an ebony cane which dismayed Phillimore.

Setting the umbrella against the wall, Persano asked if it was what the other had come to obtain.

"Indeed it is." Though he tried to sound casual, Phillimore stepped too hastily toward the umbrella. Immediately, Persano interposed himself between object and subject, simultaneously grasping his cane with both hands. A long metallic *whoosh*— and the weapon in the ebony sheath pointed naked at Phillimore's breast.

Persano did not appear the least bit ruffled or perturbed. In his customary even, well-modulated voice, he suggested that Phillimore might do well to offer some plausible explanation as to what he was doing in Moriarty's house.

"But I told you everything. Put that dreadful thing away!"

The other clucked disapprovingly. "I perceive a mere exhortation that you practice candor is of no weight. Very well; let me simply note that according to your tale, you just arrived here from an alien world."

"That's what I said."

"Then it seems a trifle unlikely that you would be aware that the river which flows nearby is named the Thames."

Phillimore winced. *Roconcile it quickly, or—*

"I beg you spare me the fruits of hurried mental revision of your original tale. I have spoken ere this with Colonel Moran, and he told me of a chap who fits your description showing up out of nowhere on the ledge at Reichenbach. He also said you had an umbrella which the Professor bore away with him.

"It has occured to me and the Colonel that if that umbrella were of similar design to the one here beside me our chief may have activated it. Your presence tonight tends to confirm that supposition."

Phillimore's resolve plummeted. Casting about for some desperate mode of aid, he returned to the sideboard where the lantern still flickered its lurid glare over walls and furnishings. "Well, I suppose I must admit you have me at a disadvantage. What next?"

"Kindly keep away from that lantern," Persano sharply warned, making a tiny circle in the air in its direction with the tip of his sword. "Eschew heroics and hear me. We may be of use to one another."

"Impossible!"

"Tut, gratuitous rudeness suggests ill breeding. There is a clear advantage for both of us to grasp."

Phillimore shrugged. "I fail to see it."

"You can help me bring the Professor back, I don't doubt."

"How do you deduce that?"

"Just before I heard the thumping around down here, I was upstairs

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mulling over the problem of locating him. It suddenly occurred to me the key might be in that bookshelf. When I walked in, you were inspecting it, an action that confirmed my belief."

"I still don't see what benefit that provides me," Phillimore argued.

"Simple. You tell me your deductions. In exchange, I tender you your life." It was beneath Persano to make the alternative explicit, but the still-lofted sword was eloquent enough.

Phillimore mulled over his predicament. In no way did he trust Persano to keep his word. The only hope he had to twist the situation in his favor was to get hold of the umbrella.

"I appear to have no choice but accept your proposition."

Persano shrugged. "I certainly see no other way."

"Well, as a matter of fact," Phillimore lied, "I had just conclusively ascertained where Professor Moriarty went when you walked in."

"And where is that?"

The scholar waggled his finger in the fashion of a pedagogue admonishing the class wag. "No, no, I should be a veritable dunce to inform you of my secret. Give me the umbrella and I'll prove I'm right by going on and fetching him back to this world."

Persano chuckled. "All collective bargaining begins, does it not, with impossible demands which neither party expects to obtain, *n'est-ce pas*? Now that we have both insulted one another's intelligences, let us come up with a reasonable compromise. You work the umbrella so that it takes you where you have in mind, thus keeping your secret. I will make the flight with you."

"And skewer me, I suppose, upon arrival!"

With one palm upward in a gesture of *bonhomie*, Persano demurred. "My word as a gentleman to the contrary. If we cannot trust one another, we shall never get on with this." As token of his earnest, the villain replaced his sword within, its scabbard. Picking up the umbrella, he bade Phillimore take hold of it.

Well, might as well try what may. The question was which source to select—the *Newgate Calendar*, Fielding or John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Fielding, he decided instantly, was incorrect; in that book, Johnathan Wild was little better than a cutpurse highwayman. Surely Moriarty would be more eager to consort with a criminal who organized London's greatest network of crime during the early 1700's. On the other hand, there might be practical value to dealing with Gay's Peachum, a character modeled on Wild. Peachum might easily rid Phillimore of the dangerous Persano; a word in his ear and the pious double-dealer would "peach" on Persano to the authorities and—

"Come, come!" Persano snapped. "Enough wool-gathering! Activate this thing instantly, or I shall think twice about our arrangement."

Phillimore sighed. Just once he wished he might take his time and work the umbrella properly. *However . . .*

He pushed the button, which was in practically the same spot as the one on his own model.

The universe reversed itself and did its giddy tarantella. Phillimore, who was somewhat used to umbrella-flight by that time, did his best to joggle Persano loose, but the other merely clutched his cane tighter and paid no attention.

The flight was brief. The umbrella, automatically closing itself, deposited them on a hard floor. The air was

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close, cold, clammy.

They were in total darkness.

Thrashing about with his free hand, Phillimore tried to locate something solid; a wall, anything. He did not succeed. The blackness was absolute.

"Where in hell have you taken us?" Persano demanded.

At the sound of his speech there came a sudden chorus of raucous voices. A tinder scratched, a torch flared. Snarls and imprecations. The sudden laying-on of hands. Phillimore flailed in terror, Persano began to withdraw his sword.

Two bright objects flashed and fell and the pair, groaning, sank down to the stone floor unconscious.

Chapter Four

As IT IS necessary that all great and surprising events, the designs of which are laid, conducted, and brought to perfection by the utmost force of human invention and art, should be elucidated to the satisfaction of the startled peruser of this modest history, it is therefore essential to explain that the hapless Phillimore and his nemesis, Persano, were brought by the device of Moriarty's umbrella to the very stronghold-cellar of that same Johnathan Wild who kept the minions of crime in London, circa 1716, under his ruthless guidance and instruction by the simple system of turning all obstreperous objectors directly over to the governmental authorities, a method which ironically caused the common press to greatly value the public services of the same Mr. Wild. But irony was one of Wild's favorite devices, and he was frequently wont to state in moments of well-concealed candor that he should far prefer to stand upon the summit of a dunghill in Hell than at the bottom of a mountain in Paradise.

Irony, indeed, presided over the appearance of our protagonist in Mr. Wild's cellar that particular evening. For some time, the duplicitous Wild was troubled by the unruly exploits of a young burglar by name of Jack Sheppard, a gentleman whose derring-do excited the honest London citizenry as much as his bravura attitude toward the Prince of Robbers awoke unexpressed sympathy amongst Wild's necessarily loyal underlings. If the reader will permit yet another anachronism, Sheppard was a veritable Eighteenth Century Houdini, having escaped repeatedly from confinement. When informed he must contribute a percentage of his criminous gains to the Wild organization, Shephard sneered that "the fat rogue may seethe in his own gallows-grease ere that come to pass!" Whereupon, the same being reported to Wild, he bespoke himself to a certain corrupt official and shortly thereafter, Sheppard was apprehended and remanded to prison. The next morning, the bird was flown the coop and word circulated amongst the tapsters of the underworld that Sheppard vowed to avenge himself upon Wild by burglarizing his very establishment within a fortnight.

When Phillimore and Persano awoke, they found themselves bound with stout rope and secured to great iron rings high above the cellar floor so that they must perforce dangle, feet scant inches from the stone surface below. The ache was intolerable in their limbs, but the spectacle presented to their dismayed view took their minds a little off their physical discomfort.

It was a large cellar, stacked with wine-casks, arched here and there with portals to further recesses where

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all manner of rich costumery and pelf lay in tagged orderliness, the merchandise which Wild was wont to take in trade from his henchmen, thence to be "sought out amongst the lower classes" and returned, sans questions," to the anxious original owners, though never for a fee other than what the good hearts of the grateful victims served by Wild might choose to disburse upon his "poor honest efforts on their behalves."

A small company of unwholesome-looking brigands stood in a band, observing Persano and Phillimore. One particularly nasty giants (whose oft-scarred countenance was distinguished by skin tinged an unhealthy blue tint) held Persano's sword-cane, the weapon partially withdrawn; the ghoulish villain leered with pleasure upon the thing, which he evidently considered to be his own fairly-gained property. Phillimore glanced anxiously about, saw the black umbrella negligently laid in a corner, an object apparently of no worth to his captors.

The group of thieves and murderers, for so they were, parted to allow their chief to descend to the middle of the cellar. This illustrious personage, none other than Mr. Jonathan Wild himself, was tall and uncommonly portly; his complexion, though fair, was mottled and pocked, and his lips protruded in a parody of a judge's opprobrious pout. His raiment was of the finest cut, but the topknot which adorned his skull might have been better for washing. He carried his hands behind his figured waist coat and clasped them in the mode of a stern headmaster; his head turned constantly in a curiously reptilian motion as if he were seeking out the pranks of a mischievous urchin who only chose to dally when his principal's back was turned. Wild, as he passed the rogue with the blue skin, paused to observe the fine woodwork of the ebony sword-cane.

"What doth this signify, rascal?" he growled. "I flatter myself this is booty justly earned for the betterment of the establishment at large, of which you and all your fellows are pleased to benefit! Restore it at once!"

He held his hand out expectantly, and there was some hesitation on Blueskin's part before he set the stick in Wild's hand. "Take it, if tha's a mind," the henchman grumbled, "but take care it do not turn about and do ye damage."

Wild glowered at the man. A more perceptive observer than his underlings would have fairly heard the fatal computation clicking in his skull to do over Blueskin to the authorities come next quarter. Having silently damned the luckless scoundrel, Wild turned and regarded the two hanging captives. Setting his weight pompously upon Persano's cane, he swaggered to a place a few feet before them, far enough back so neither could aim a kick at him.

"Well, lads," he chuckled oilily, "Sheppard fee'd ye to a bitter purpose. I wondered how he dared to brag of this venture and hope to 'scape incarceration."

"Let us down," Persano demanded. "We know nothing of this Sheppard. Free us and we will satisfy you of the strange, but innocent reason for our appearing thus."

"By addressing you," Wild admonished, "I did not mean to instance you toward debate. You will maintain silence, base fellow! It is unseemly such unprincipled rascals, garbed liked lunatics, should befoul the ears of an honest citizen with the foul billingsgate to which you are accustomed in your element." He turned to one

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of his gang. "Fetch Mr. Brown hither with his men and deliver over these rogues to justice." Wild again studied his captives, this time with an air of perplexity. "How you managed to enter without disturbing the locks, I cannot hope to perceive, yet your master, Sheppard, has witch-power with the instruments of security, and I venture to suppose he has played for his immortal part when he spirited the pair of you within mine honest walls!"

Shaking his head, Wild continued his discourse in song, much to Persano's amazement. The villains by the stairs crooned softly in harmony, and Phillimore winced and murmured, "Not again!"

AIR to the tune of *An old woman clothes in grey,*

WILD Through all the employments of life,
Each neighbour abuses his brother;
Jack Sheppard, persistent in strife,
Doth cause me interminable pother!
The thief calls the robber a cheat,
While poor honest Johnathan Wild
Is slandered, although I'm as sweet
As an unsullied innocent child!

The song ended, he observed, "A lawyer is as honest as I. We both act in double capacity, against rogues and for 'em! And so, gentlemen—" he winked wickedly at the dangling duo—"and so, good-night!" Turning, Wild ascended the stairs, followed by his ghastly crew.

The sound of a heavy door clanging shut resounded through the cellar; immediately ensuing was the noise of bolts being shoved into place. All the torches having been borne away, Phillimore and Persano again found themselves in the dark.

"You wretched fool!" Persano grumbled. "In what nonsensical world have you enmired us?"

Phillimore, by now a veteran of abortive umbrella-flights, hung relatively unperturbed. "It is obvious what went wrong. Had you not hurried my choice, we would have fetched the world of Johnathan Wild. But because of your precipitance, I would venture to guess we are on a bastard earth composed of equal elements of the *New Calendar*, Henry Fielding and assuredly John Gay."

"How do you make that out?"

"Wild is pretty much as history paints him, yet he speaks in a florid style suggestive of Fielding—"

"And the song obviously reflects *The Beggar's Opera*?"

"Precisely."

"But why," Persano raged, "would you pick *any* of those places?"

"Because I postulate that Wild's iron-fisted grip on the London underworld would appeal to Professor Moriarty. Here would be a network of crime ready to hand. . .all he need do is arrange some compromise in exchange for his unique talents. Or perhaps, he might choose to wrest power away from Wild and—"

"And stuff and abominable nonsense! My leader would not be fool enough to attempt to bargain with the most unprincipled rogue in the annals of illegality. And as for taking over, why run the dreadful risk? It would be as foolhardy as Wild attempting to oust the Professor: there are too many loyal lieutenants who would carry the intelligence to the proper source and work to quash him. No, no, he *never* would have come here, or anyplace like it!" Persano glowered at Phillimore, but it was dark and the expression served no purpose. "And you told me you knew precisely where he'd gone. . ."

Phillimore said nothing. As usual,

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Persano lived by the code of proper conduct. One might slit a throat or two in the course of everyday business, but deliberate prevarication was rather ungentlemanly, ergo, shocking.

"Well," the scholar sighed, "never mind where we are. The question is, how do we get away?"

"As for that," Persano grunted, "I have been swinging my feet in hopes of clamping hold of the umbrella. They . . .left it . . .withing reach. Except—"

"Except what?"

"I can only approximately recall its position. This blasted darkness . . .!"

"Well, you might as well spare the effort. It won't do us much good; the thing needs to be recharged, and it takes quite some time."

"Not this model. It's quite efficient. Half-an-hour is all it requires to rebuild its energy, and we have surely been here close to that, perhaps longer, it's hard to say how long we were unconscious. . . *There*! . . .No, not quite . . .but now I know where it is . . .and . . .".

Phillimore heard Persano grunt. There was the sound of his feet striking the stone wall; a clatter followed, then Persano cursed.

"What happened?"

"I'm afraid I knocked the umbrella out of reach. And I thought—"

"Shhh!"

Persano, always lightning-rapid in his reactions, immediately hushed, no questions asked.

The two hung, arms aching, breaths stilled. In the darkness, they heard the stealthy rasp of metal against metal. The most subtle of scrapings repeated twice. . .thrice . . .and then a muffled *click*.

A cold breeze suddenly flooded the cellar. The gloom dispelled slightly; Phillimore was able to see the glimmer of his own scuffed black shoes, though nothing else.

A lengthy silence, then to their strained ears came the gentlest susuration, an all-but-inaudible scuffle which indicated that someone stealthily trod the stone flagging of Wild's basement.

After an interminable period, during which no other sound was heard, the newcomer, apparently satisfied the place was temporarily safe and secure, lit a small flambeaux. Phillimore strained his neck to one side to perceive the aspect of the person who stood, unbidden, in the cellar of the Prince of Thieves.

It was a young man, scarcely past his teen, he judged. A handsome, regularly-featured face contained black, glinting eyes and was surmounted by a shock of pitch-black glossy hair. The mouth had broad, generous lips that surely were no stranger to mirth.

The intruder shone his torch around the cellar. Suddenly spying the two suspended occupants thereof, he emitted a startled hiss, immediately quelling it as he assessed their helpless situation. Laying a finger perpendicular to his mouth to caution them not to say anything, the youth approached Phillimore, the nearer of the two, and brought his lips as close to the captive's ears as the awkward updrawn position would permit.

"I daresay ye've run aground of that foul and fearsome bloodsucker, Wild," he whispered.

"Aye," Phillimore confirmed. "Can ye cut us loose?" He would have feared to adopt the accent of the place, save for those assurances he had been given at the Diogenes Club as to the purely subjective nature of subsumption. Phillimore knew per-

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fectly well this newcomer must be Jack Sheppard arrived to make good his boast, but for once kept his seerish knowledge to himself, lest the other grow suspicious.

"Any man who is enemy to Wild is my friend," the young man said, withdrawing a knife to sever the bonds. "I do not know who ye may be, attired in ludicrous gallimaufry as you are, but I will number ye evermore my fast friend, so ye do likewise. But do ye ken thy benefactor?"

"Oh, ay, right enough," Phillimore replied. "Only Jack Sheppard himself could work such wizardry with that devil Wild's locks!" As he spoke, the rope parted and he slumped to the floor with a stifled groan, rubbing his chafed wrists.

Sheppard, flattered at his renown, bowed, grinned a crooked grin, then, sotto voce, began to sing. Phillimore sighed; he knew from Gilbert-and-Sullivan-land that the etiquette of place dictated waiting the damned verses out.

AIR to the tune of *A soldier and a sailor*

SHEPP.

A fox may steal your hens, Sir,
A scrivener all your pens, Sir,
But all the rest you own, Sir,
With Sheppard's surely flown, Sir,
No bar is locked or gate!
For every stay I'm picking;
And omnes: pens, hens, chickling,
Shall ever be my fee, Sir
And if I do but see, Sir,
I'll also—

"Will you have done with that untimely caterwauling?!" Persano interrupted in as loud a snarl as he deemed advisable.

Stopping the song at once, Sheppard turned an affronted countenance upon his aural intruder.

"Who is that ill-mannered bumpkin?" he demanded. "Never in this short life have I met one so confoundedly low-bred as to cut in on one's musical peroration! That goes beyond every runagate knave, even Mr. Wild!"

Persano, stung by the aspersions cast on his breeding, haughtily demanded that he be cut free upon the instant.

"The devil I will!" Sheppard snapped. "If your companion finds aught to pleasure him in such surly company, let him set ye at liberty, for I'll have none of it!"

Phillimore looked sharply at Persano, expecting him to speak. But that quick mind instantly assessed his personal predicament and knew better than to petition aid from the one quarter where he was certain it would not come.

Suddenly, from above; a babble of voices. The three cast apprehensive glances in the direction of the stair.

"Hurry," Phillimore whispered, "Wild has sent for the authorities to take us to prison. Mr. Sheppard, you must quit this place on the instant, otherwise you will be in great danger!"

The other pressed the scholar's arm reassuringly, cast about for some valuable to spirit away, found a large, ornate pearl-inlaid jewel box. He gave Phillimore a broad wink. "The fat jackanapes will miss this right enough!" Then, without another word he sped from the cellar into the night.

Phillimore cursed his own stupidity. Sheppard, having taken his flambeaux, left him no light to find the umbrella. Dropping on his hands and knees, he fumbled frantically about the cold, grimy floor. Above, the voices neared.

"To my left," Persano whispered.

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"Judge the spot from my voice!"

Phillimore practically threw himself into the indicated corner, scrabbling every which way, arms flailing. His sleeves brushed something. He slapped his hands palm-flat upon the flagging and located the umbrella.

"I've got it!"

"I'm delighted to hear it," Persano said unenthusiastically.

Phillimore bit his lip. His conscience could not accept the responsibility of leaving Persano—arch-villain though he was—to the savage ministrations of Eighteenth Century British justice.

"Well, I *would* get you down if I could, but Sheppard took away his dagger."

"I have one strapped to the inside of my left leg."

Shuddering at Persano's resourcefulness, Phillimore felt for the weapon, a six-inch blade honed to razor-keenness.

Withdrawing it, he slashed at Persano's bindings. The voices upstairs approached the cellar door.

"May I remind you," Phillimore grunted, sawing at the thick rope, "it was your impatience that served to keep you in this predicament."

"As for that," the other rejoined, "it was you who first chose this wretchedly inauspicious world."

Phillimore heard Wild's rumbling voice above. The keys began to turn in the lock as someone shot back the bolts. Just then the long dagger severed the rope. Persano, though his limbs must have ached bitterly, landed on his feet. He instantly snatched at the dagger, but Phillimore leapt backwards even as he grasped the umbrella securely. He tossed the dagger into a far corner so it was too distant for Persano to risk fetching in the scant time available.

"Now—*where* should we go?" Phillimore demanded, placing his thumb on the umbrella.

"I'll do that!" Persano argued, quickly grabbing at the instrument with both hands. "Don't you see, the Professor would choose a world where some important resource indigenous solely to it would be at hand. Think what a formidable tool he might fashion if he could but commandeer the—"

"Magic!" Phillimore exclaimed, cutting off the other.

"No! I was *going* to say—"

The cellar door flew open with a bang, interrupting Persano a second time. Torches flared, feet clattered downstairs. Wild, at the rear of the group, spied the unshackled unprisoners and roared in anger and dismay.

"Apprehend them! They are surely devils!"

"*Quick*!" Persano shouted. "Move your hand!"

He and Phillimore simultaneously scrabbled to press the button of the umbrella. Both forefingers hit it at once.

Just before the first of the thugs threw their arms about the two of them, the umbrella sprang open and the quarry quickly faded from view.

"By God," Blueskin whispered, horrified, "Sheppard is indeed in league with Satan!"

"That's as may be," Wild growled, "but what is more to the point, the fiends hath swiped my second-best jewel-box!"

DIMENSIONAL RIPTIDES battered them. Phillimore's stomach flipflopped; he clutched the leather curved handpiece with a strength born of colossal panic. Cosmic cross-winds shrieked, buffeting the umbrella so

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ferociously that the fabric fluctuated with a violent flapping that the scholar feared would soon tear the material to shreds.

"Persano, tune out!" he screamed. "It isn't made to receive two frequencies of thought at once!"

The other did not hear him in the wild cacophony of universal protestation. Persano clung desperately to the metal shaft, though it was growing uncomfortably hot.

What if it uses too much energy? Phillimore worried. *Can't let it burn out!*

There was only one thing to do. Phillimore silently commanded it to compromise with the other signal. *Hope it can figure out what I mean!*

The umbrella emitted a high-pitched whine. Persano howled in pain. The shaft glowed red.

Compromise, damn it! Compromise!

In response, the umbrella suddenly nosed downwards, yanking Phillimore head-under-heels into a star-shot darkness. Below, though the teacher could not see, Persano had to let loose of the fiery pole; he snatched desperately at the cloth-folds. All Phillimore knew was that there was a sudden lightening of the drag. Before he could sort out his thoughts, the umbrella swerved the other way, and he came rightside-up, feet glancingly scraping ground.

A wind of demoniac fury. . .peals of thunder. . .an awful yell . . .

Another weight depended downward from the umbrella, but the pull was enormous, easily three times that of Persano's. The umbrella soared straight up, and the renewed velocity, even with its heavier burden, swiftly cooled the shaft. In the midst of all the brouhaha and wrenching alteration of motion, Phillimore fancied hearing a half-human snarl close by, while, in the distance, Persano's dismayed wail dwindled to nothingness.

The flight was surer now, swifter. Phillimore was so giddy he had to shut his eyes against the cartoon constellations gyrating in his head. He squeezed the leather handpiece, afraid that in his faintness he might lose his grip and fall.

Abruptly, all sense of motion ceased. The noise of flight dwindled to the hushed whisper of breakers on a nameless beach; the stars winked out and left him in pitch darkness. His feet touched down on the soft-hard shifting surface that was a great stretch of sand.

Nearby he thought he heard the dull plop of some ponderous weight sprawling flat. He was too weary to think about it.

Phillimore's numb fingers released the now-shut umbrella. He pitched headfirst onto the sand, sighed thankfully for the cool breeze soothing his face and sank into an exhausted slumber.

Chapter Six

HE WOKE when the first gentle plash of incoming tide slid a clamshell under his nose. Sputtering at the salt-taste wetting his lips, Phillimore sat up and blinked at the bright morning sun glimmering on the cresting ocean. The dissonant cries of a flock of circling seabirds filled the air, and a mild breeze fluttered the umbrella where it lay, but there were no other sounds or signs of animation.

A second incursion of the surf hurried him to his feet and back a few steps to dry sand.

Facing inland, umbrella in hand, Phillimore studied the coastline. The broad sweep of beach curved gently

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and steadily backwards about a mile on either side, suggesting he might be on an island. Following the contour of the seafront at a distance of fifty or sixty feet was a thick tangle of palm, coconut, and less familiar trees and brush. Further inland, the tops of lofty rockfaces were just barely discernible. Some distance away to the left, a narrow gap broke the barrier of greenery; through it flowed a thin sparkling twist of fresh water, a small stream seeking the sea.

He turned right and saw the footprints.

They began alongside a great irregular indentation in the sand close to the spot where he lay all night. They stretched in a crooked line to the trees and disappeared there.

Phillimore approached the prints, noted their size and felt vaguely uneasy. He walked beside them to their terminus at the jungle's edge. At that point, he spied a twisted, trampled alley through the brake that something must have torn open in its passage.

The scholar felt thirsty, anyway, so he saw no reason to enter the thick woods just there. Turning, he stepped along the beach in the direction of the stream, nervously darting glances into the trees as he strode the skirts of the sand.

"At least I've lost Persano. Wonder if I got where I wanted to go? How in hell am I to find out?"

At the streamside, Phillimore slaked his thirst. He opened his collar and removed his jacket, for the morning sun already felt bake-oven hot. As he pondered the best course of action to embark on, a curious sound drew his attention to the jungle. He could not be certain, but it seemed as if someone was sobbing.

Taking a final gulp of water, Phillimore put down his jacket, shifted his umbrella so he might, if necessary, employ it as a club, and stepped off in the direction of the whimpering. He followed the creek-bank into the shelter of the trees.

The shade of leaves far above his head made the heat more bearable; he filled his lungs with air heavied by the sour-sweet odor of decaying matter. Carefully, Phillimore walked along the bend of stream that, like a crooked finger, beckoned him toward the source of the misery.

A few yards further and the trees parted to reveal a small, lush glade. In its middle, seated on a low, flat stone, a small man of advanced years huddled with his head in his hands. His shoulders heaved with elaborately melodramatic sighs and eloquent sobs. Phillimore noted with satisfaction the man's outlandish garb: red balloon-leg pantaloons cinched by a broad yellow silken cummerbund; blue sandals with up-pointed toes and a matching turban blotched with sweat, tattered from years of neglect. The bare-chested stranger was short, portly and white-bearded. When he lowered his hands from his puffy jowls and wrinkled brows, he displayed a pair of woe-filled eyes that flowed copious streams of sorrow.

"Almighty Allah!" he wailed, hands stretched above his head, "Is the unspeakable sin of Abu Hassan never to be forgotten? Must I endure the whips of public opprobrium even here where I had thought to shun the scornful faces of my fellow-men forever? Is not my name sufficiently blackened? Cannot the divine mercy of Blessed Allah expunge from memory the loathsome crime of Abu Hassan?" He beat his breast and plucked out a patch of chest-hair in wild grief.

"Here, here," Phillimore ex-

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claimed, taking pity at such protracted and deep-seated suffering. Entering the glade, he asked, "Is there anything, poor fellow, that can be done to relieve you?"

Abu Hassan turned a mournful countenance upon the newcomer. "Sir, leave me to my remorse and do not mock me. Must I be shamed even here on this deserted isle where I betook myself in voluntary exile in order that I might never more see the leering eyes and pointing fingers of those who judge and condemn me? Is there no balm in Gilead? No nepenthe for my griefs?"

"But look here, I don't know what you're talking about! I never heard of you before. I only thought I might be able to help somehow."

Abu Hassan stared for a long time at Phillimore, an expression of mingled wonder and joy flitting coquettishly about the edges of his hangdog face. Rising from his rock, the tubby little penitent took a tottering step toward the scholar, then paused fearfully. "Stranger," he said pleadingly, "do not be crueler than mine own conscience! Is it possible that never to your ears came the report of Abu Hassan's dreadful and nameless deed? Can there be a single soul who has not listened maliciously to the shame and fall of one of the most opulent merchants of the City Kaukaban of Al-Yaman?"

"I tell you, I don't know anything about it. I shall not despise you for what is long passed and gone." In truth, Phillimore was beginning to recollect some vague detail of the tale of Abu Hassan, but its principal essence still escaped definition But the important thing was he recalled it was a story from *The Arabian Nights*, and that proved the umbrella had eventually listened to him. He reasoned that Moriarty, who owned the Burton translation of the famous anthology of Oriental anecdota, might well decide to fly to a world where magic was an operant part of the underlying plan. *Think what a tool he might make from Alladin's Lamp*! Phillimore mused, unconsciously paraphrasing Persano as he last saw him in Johnathan Wild's cellar.

Meanwhile, Abu Hassan still harangued the teacher for assurance that he was indeed a perfect stranger and might embrace his company without shame.

"Believe me, I do not know you," Phillimore asserted, only partly lying. *But I'd better pretend total ignorance if I'm to get anything out of the old windbag*!

It took many minutes to satisfy the distrustful Abu Hassan, but at length Phillimore succeeded in turning the conversation to other topics.

"You said we are on an isle. But on what part of the globe are we quartered?" That was the trouble with the umbrella: it had no especial discrimination in the places it chose to deposit the user. If Moriarty were somewhere about, it might be thousands of miles from where Phillimore landed. *How to find him*?

"This is an uncharted isle," Abu Hassan stated, "somewhere in the southern tropics to the west of the Sea of Indus."

"And are we the only living things upon it?"

The other broke into a delighted grin, the first truly light-hearted expression he had been able to don since the arrival of Phillimore. "Ah, no, sir! You are indeed fortunate to make the acquaintance of Abu Hassan at this propitious time! For one of the most wondrous spectacles in the entire vastiness of this world is about to

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take place upon the crags of yonder peak! Ah! how grateful I am at the limitless compassion of Mighty Allah that at length my prayers are answered. . .for lo! these many years have I, in my most secret heart, forlornly (so I thought) yearned for a companion ignorant of my foul transgression. For such an one, I vowed, would I ope the scintillant spectacle of this magical clime. The isle is full of noises, good friend, ay, and sights beyond dream! And but this time of year, for a little while only, the fabled great creatures of the air woo the earth and bring forth their young!"

Phillimore wearily expressed polite interest. It was apparent the Abu Hassan would be no ready font of data, at least not without enduring a mighty spate of tendium intermixed. With resignation, he suggested that the other bring him to witness the marvelous thing he hinted of.

"Hush then, stranger!" cautioned Abu Hassan. "Hush, and follow me, for we must go some little distance and the journey is not without peril." With that, he turned and began to pick his way through the underbrush, signaling Phillimore to follow.

Peril? A cold prickle hopskipped up and down his spine as some of the less pleasant details of the stories of Scheherezade occurred to him. There was magic in *The Arabian Nights*, sure enough, but also fabulous monsters and frights.

He followed reluctantly, realizing he had no choice if he wanted to question Abu Hassan on possible modes of escape from the island. Phillimore's stomach rumbled hungrily. Abu Hassan turned and motioned for utter silence; whether his expression denoted fear or simple disapproval Phillimore could not tell.

Their path lay steadily, inexorably uphill. As the hike grew increasingly strenuous. Phillimore paused ever more often, winded. The climb was difficult enough, but he was also encumbered by the awkward size and considerable weight of the black umbrella.

The greenery grew sparser the higher they mounted. They scrambled over steep expanses treacherous with small stones underfoot. One such place, the scholar's foot slipped; he sprawled on his face to save himself from pitching down the slope. This action precipitated a small hailstorm of pebbles clattering down the rockside. Abu Hassan, whirling, hissed for quiet, his face white with fear rather than anger.

"There is now great danger," he whispered, pointing across to a ledge many feet higher and to the right. "The purple troll's lair!"

He insisted on remaining perfectly still for some minutes. While they waited, he strained to hear anything which portended menace.

"I thought you said there were no living things save us and the birds on the isle," Phillimore murmured directly in Abu Hassan's ear.

"That is Allah's own truth, sire," the other replied softly. "There are no other *living* things . . ."

Phillimore swallowed with considerable difficulty.

After a long motionless time, during which neither breathed more than necessity required, a subtle *whirr*, low and distant, came to Phillimore's ears. As he listened, the sound drew nearer, greatly increasing in pitch and volume. A moment more and he identified it as a colossal cacophony of bird-cry and wing-flapping, louder, more terrible than any such mundane noises had any right to be. The tops of the trees be-

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neath them began to sway and bend in the wind and they felt a sudden draft, fetid and powerful as a hurricane. The sky grew dark.

"Quickly!" Abu Hassan exclaimed in the deafening din. "This flight covers our movements!" He sprang up and scuttled diagonally across the slanted plane of rock, moving away from the direction of the trolls's eyrie. Phillimore hastened to follow.

It was long past midday. The sun's burning-rays beat fiercely upon them. Phillimore was so thirsty he temporarily forgot his hunger. Up and up they climbed, the wind propelling them with double speed. They had to fight to keep from being swept off the precipice as the worm-inched around a sharp spine that divided the different-facing mountainsides. Phillimore clung to the umbrella with difficulty, averting his eyes from the Cineramic riot of island, forest and sea below.

On the other side of the spine, the cliff mercifully leveled out somewhat; their feet found relatively horizontal terrain to tread upon. The wind died down, and in the sudden disquieting hush, Phillimore heard the sound of the great birds more clearly than before. The noise proceeded from a point not far above.

The slope was gentle now. Abu Hassan swiftly made his way up till he gained the apex of the slanted path. Attaining it, he waved his hand warningly at Phillimore, then, lying flat on his stomach, cautiously beckoned the professor to come and join him.

Phillimore crept up the final distance and, emulating his guide, stretched out prone. Carefully he raised his head till his eyes saw beyond the latter extremity of the path.

What he beheld was a wide mesa far below the overhanging lip of rock which comprised the latter end of the slope they'd climbed. Devoid of vegetation, the vast plateau was cupped by the ridges and shelves of the confining precipice. In the middle of the tableland was a spectacle that bulged his eyes.

A stupendous white dome shone in the dwindling rays of the sun; next to it lay the rubble of an identical globe: two gargantuan hemispheres seamed, splintered and fragmented by some colossal force. Phillimore had no doubt concerning the source of the dome's demolition since, next to it, there stood a black-feathered bird as big as a brownstone in College Heights. The avian monstrosity calmly balanced first on one mammoth foot, then the other. It lifted its head up expectantly.

"It's just hatched," Abu Hassan whispered. "It's only a baby."

"I presume it's a roc?"

"Yes. See. . .the mother came to see if it was hatched. Now it's gone again to get junior some food."

They waited while the baby announced its hunger in periodic cries so loud Phillimore had to stick his fingers in his ears. After seven or eight minutes, the rapid approach of the mother-bird was prefigured by the same raucous whirr of wings heard before, as well as a similar wind and the inevitable blotting-out of the sun.

Graak!!

The baby bird signaled its joy at its mother's return in a cry so mighty it nearly knocked Phillimore off the cliff. Abu Hassan pointed up at the mother roc, a bird bigger than Mallin Hall at Parker College. A creature far surpassing the hyperbole of nightmare, the roc carried an elephant in its bill, a tidbit which it delivered to its baby.

"And now," Abu Hassan chortled

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with suppressed glee, "you shall hear a thing that even a Caliph could not command for his pleasure!"

The pachyderm being disposed of, a mere high-tea snack, the baby roc waddled to its mother, nestled in her wings and started to croon as softly as an express train late for dinner. The mother bird joined in, and the combined nerve-shattering sound made the mountain quiver.

Phillimore, fingers in ears, was about to suggest a rapid return journey when Abu Hassan nudged him to look across the plateau to a ledge some seventy or eighty yards distant.

On it squatted a purple quasi-human thing with protrusive toad-eyes, pimpled hairy tongue and thin arms terminating in sabre-curved talons. The entity mildly contemplated the cooing birds below for several seconds, then, opening its fang-filled mouth wide, bagan to howl and squawk in a manner calculated to bring bad dreams unto the sleeping dead. Phillimore felt the hair rise on his forearms as multitudes of goose-bumps declared their presence.

"Every year," Abu Hassan confided to him *sotto voce*, "when the new born chicks hatch out, the purple troll blends its voice with the bird-song. A rich thing, I declare, that so fell a beast can be thus moved by the beauty of nature's birthing music!"

"Yes, yes," Phillimore agreed wearily, shuddering at the aspect of the purple troll, "but see here, I'm ready to climb down. If I don't eat something soon. I won't have the strength to descend."

"But nay!" Abu Hassan protested. "It is too soon to return. This opportunity doth come but once a year, and it is my habit to hear all the melody that they care to produce."

"In that case," the scholar groaned, "you'll excuse me. I'm going."

He started down the slope. Behind him, Abu Hassan sadly shook his head, convinced that his new companion was a tone-deaf lout. Yet in defense of our protagonist it must be declared that the very opposite was true: Phillimore's ears were too sophisticated for the grating primal musicale taking place on the mountain. For, after all, a man whose ears are accustomed to the subtly chiseled harmonies of a Dowland or Purcell, a man who revels in the ascetic tonal architecture of a Bach can hardly be expected to stay still and tolerate the primitive dynamic crudities of a roc and troll concert.

Chapter Seven

BY THE TIME he reached the jungle floor, it was nearly dark. Exhausted, ravenously hungry, Phillimore also was hopelessly lost. He had no idea in which direction lay the stream.

"Well, one thing at a time," he chided himself. "Better look for something nourishing before all the light is gone."

No adept at natural science, Phillimore dimly guessed he was more likely to turn up edible seafood at dawn then dusk, and anyway, he didn't want to waste the twilight wandering aimlessly through the woods. Aware of his shortcomings as a botanical expert, he avoided berries he did not recognize and settled for a handful of nuts and a pair of coconuts recently fallen to the ground. These latter proved an immense problem to open, and he only did so by desperate measures which cost him most of the milk within one of the nuts.

Choosing an adjacent glade to consume his meager fare, he sat down and rested his back against a palm

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tree. Supper was soon over. Phillimore made a feeble effort to rise, but his still, aching limbs protested and he did not budge.

"Ought to look for Abu Hassan," he mumbled thickly, as he fell asleep.

Phillimore slumbered for hours. A pale crescent moon rose and in the forest, night-things snuffled and rooted for forage. A sea-breeze stole into the jungle, eradicating the noontide heat. He shivered, partly from the chill air, partly because of the malevolent creatures romping through his over-stimulated subconscious.

Shortly past midnight, the breeze died down. Phillimore woke abruptly, vaguely aware that something was horribly wrong. Still tired, he could not immediately single out the disturbing circumstance; but at length he gathered his wits sufficiently to isolate the thing that made him rouse from troubled sleep.

It was too quiet. The dell lay in an unnatural silence that was curiously ominous, impending. He heard nothing of the myriad sounds that small animals produce among the thick maze of boles and bramble that constitute a forest; no sound, not even the stridulation of a lone insect.

A black cloud concealed the moon. He could barely see two feet in front of his nose. And yet—

By the foot of the mountain, etched hazily against the slightly less gloomy background of the night sky, a great bulky shape loomed. Motionless it stood, possibly nothing more sinister than a slanting stand of fern. Yet Phillimore conceived the nasty notion that the thing was watching him.

Thinking over his predicament, he decided the first thing on the agenda was to get hold of the umbrella, though he was uncertain whether to use it as a weapon or as a mode of escape. Still, if he should decide the most prudent course was to indulge in a nocturnal run, he would have to take it with him, anyway . . . so . . . slowly, very slowly, he edged his fingers through the moist grass toward the place where he remembered laying the instrument.

But no sooner did he commence to move his hand, snail-slow, than the menacing patch detached itself from the surrounding murk and headed in his direction. Suddenly, the hush was shattered by a diabolic snarl/shriek that turned his blood to frost.

As the thing hurtled at him, Phillimore rolled over, grabbed the umbrella, whirled and shot to his feet, thrusting forth the up-pointed umbrella so its tip was aimed in the general direction of the onslaught. The fiendish howl rose in pitch as it neared . . . and then he felt a bone-jarring impact that almost made him sit down again. He staggered backward from the blow and the umbrella instantly was wrenched from his grip.

Just then, the cloud sailed past and let the moon shine upon the glade once more, bleeding a wan light that revealed dimly Phillimore's awful adversary.

It was the purple troll. Close up, the dead thing was even worse than he'd imagined possible. Well over six feet, it stank with the odor of rotted blood. Glowing amber eyes shone malevolently down on him; he was sure the thing could see perfectly in the darkness. Protruding from its middle was Moriarty's umbrella, half of its great length puncturing the vile creature. And yet, though it was deeply impaled, the troll showed no sign of discomfort, or even of *noticing*.

Rooted with fear, Phillimore nearly succumbed to the hypnotic glare of

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the beast's eyes. But as the wicked talons whooshed towards his neck, self-preservation surged and he jumped aside with a frightened yelp, almost braining himself against the palm tree. The troll pivoted, reared back and bared its lethal claws for a second try.

At the last possible instant, Phillimore ducked behind the tree. The troll slammed smack into the trunk, driving the umbrella further within its innards. Slavering horrendously, it slashed out at Phillimore around the curve of the bole, but only succeeded in sinking its long claws into the bark. It yanked, but they would not come out.

Panting from exertion and terror, the frightened mortal backed away and watched, ready at any moment to run if the troll showed a sign of freeing itself. But after a full minute of growling and gnashing of its teeth, it still was stuck. Phillimore approached with trepidution, knees knocking, teeth chattering, heart pounding.

But he knew he had to pull out the umbrella.

First he tried to stretch forth his hand and grab the curved grip, but the troll snapped at him so ferociously that he almost lost a finger. He leaped back five feet before timorously resolving to try again.

This time, he crouched low so its fangs couldn't reach. Ignoring the noisome breath as best he could as it ranted, he carefully stretched up his hand, grabbed the shaft and yanked. It gave slightly, then stopped. Kneeling on both knees, he leaned as close as he dared, grasped the umbrella-handle with both hands and extracted another inch of the oversized parasol, but then it was impossible to budge it further.

One at a time, he wiped his sweating hands against his trousers and tried a new purchase on the grip. The troll howled with frustrated fury, and vainly tugged to free its sharp nails from the bark of the tree.

Phillimore gained another inch of umbrella from the troll's bloodless innards, and then a remarkable thing occured. The beast suddenly stopped howling and champing its jaws. The professor, startled by the dramatic silence, looked up to see the creature gawking at something behind and above Phillimore. The troll's saucer eyes goggled so wide the scholar thought they would pop out. All at once, the purple troll began to thrash and shake with renewed vigor, mewling and whimpering as it did. Phillimore, glued to the umbrella, was knocked this way and that, but with each toss, more of the shaft came loose.

At last, with a supreme effort and a bloodcurdling ululation, the troll twisted its wrists so hard that its hands snapped off and remained nail-embedded in the tree-trunk. Not even pausing to notice the latter inconvenience, it clambered off the way it came, dragging Phillimore with it. The professor doggedly hung on, though the blundering flight bounced and jounced his posterior cruelly. But at length the umbrella twisted free and he and it tumbled once, twice, three times before sprawling in a heap at the base of a coconut-palm.

Unencumbered now, the troll lumbered swiftly off through the underbrush, burbling and gibbering. Reaching the cliffside, it scrambled its way upward toward the safety of its own lair.

Below, Phillimore lay too winded to move, a mass of bruises. Panting for breath, he had enough of his senses left to comprehend that somewhere

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close by lurked a hobgoblin so terrible that it even frightened away the sufficiently ghoulish purple troll.

His curiosity did not have long to wait for satisfaction. Heavy footsteps smashed through the jungle. The ground trembled with the coming. Wincing, Phillimore rose to his feet to see what new surprise ironic fate had up its sleeve.

He beheld the figure of an enormous being, fully seven feet tall, glowering down upon him in the twilight. The stranger's hair was a lustrous black and its teeth shone white in the feeble rays of the moon, but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with its watery, disdainful eyes, its shriveled complexion and straight black lips. The creature's unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too loathsome for human eyes to behold.

"Devil!" it exclaimed. "Vile insect! how didst thou dare wrest me from mine creator's island upon the very eve of the day when I was to be joined forever with my mate? I thought to see thee perish at the shore of this accursed isle, but behold! thou has survived that I may wreak vengeance on your treachery—which, I have some little fear, was engineered by He from whose hands I ought to have expected and deserved the most!" Here the monster gnashed its teeth and wrung its hands, wailing hideously. It was a frightful spectacle, and yet some doit of pity stirred in Phillimore's breast.

Everything came clear to him in an instant. This was the great weight that was exchanged for Persano's when Phillimore willed the umbrella to compromise with its two passengers' orders. Thus he arrived in the world of *The Arabian Nights* in the company of the "tool" that Persano thought Moriarty might be eager to commandeer.

Frankenstein's monster.

Chapter Eight

FORTUNATELY, Phillimore had once written a term paper about Mary Shelley's bizarre tragedy and therefore was quite familiar with the lineaments of its plot. More to the point, in that mini-thesis he maintained that the true villain of the tale was not the monster, but rather Frankenstein himself: spoiled, selfish, unable to love or even pity his innocent creation. Thus the monster's latter cruelties were but the logical consequences of a child denied its parent's affection.

Like many perfectly sound closet theories, it was difficlut to derive courage from in actuality, especially with murder in its mind. But Phillimore resolved to put aside his natural aversion to the fearful aspect of the monster, and try to deal with it humanely.

"See here," he said in a voice he hoped was steady, "you've got it all wrong! I didn't come to kidnap you, but rather to rescue you. I have your best interests at heart, which is more than I can say for the wretch who infused life into your limbs!"

The monster growled. "Speak no ill of mine illustrious father!"

Oh, damn! Family loyalty in monsters?

"But see here," Phillimore demurred. "I grant you that Victor Frankenstein is a scientist of extraordinary capacity, but what did he ever do for you besides bring you into existence? He abandoned you immediately thereafter!"

The monster moaned. "Yet he promised to make me a bride that I might go elsewhere and fill out mine

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days in mildness and peace."

"Rubbish! He never meant to keep his word. At the end of the experiment, he tore your intended to shreds."

The creature glowered so malignantly that Phillimore began to nervously finger the umbrella-catch. But then a puzzled expression crossed its face and it sat down on the grass and eyed Phillimore oddly.

"See here," it demanded, "how is that you know so intimately the secrets of my past and future?"

It was no time for casual flippancy. He needed a colossal lie. "Well, the—uh—the fact is, I am something of a scientist myself. Or you might call me a magician."

"Magic?" the monster beamed. "I love magic! Do me a trick!"

"Later," Phillimore promised, realizing the monster indeed possessed a great child-like brain.

"Now! Now!" the other grunted, clapping its big hands eagerly.

Oh, Good Gad! "All right, all right, calm down!" Phillimore proceeded to pretend to remove his thumb, stretched his middle finger and clap his hands without taking them apart, much to the delight of the monster.

"Teach me how to do that!" it growled delightedly.

"Only if you promise to behave and be good!"

It vigorously nodded its head, so Phillimore went through the arcane secrets of his digital conjurations. At last, when he'd regained the creature's attention with some little difficulty, he explained he chose to spirit him away from Victor Frankenstein in order to bestow eventual happiness upon him.

"How?" it demanded. "And shall I call thee master?"

How, indeed? "That won't be necessary," Phillimore replied, blushing. "When my mission is done, I will take you to a world where people won't shun you, a place where you may live happily ever after." The scholar kept his fingers crossed. *But there just might be such a place, after all. Perhaps—*

The thought was choked off, along with his breath, by the sudden seizing of the scholar by the Frankenstein monster. His first terrified thought was that the fiendish being doubted Phillimore's campaign-promise, but then he realized the bruising embrace was a thing of sheer gratitude.

"O unexpected angel!" the monster proclaimed joyously, hugging him with bone-crushing enthusiasm. "How beneficent thou art! To think I shall be delivered from the affrighted malice of the small men who would not comprehend the love I have within mine nature, could it but be unleashed! O, grant me this and I shall follow you faithfully, doing your every bidding!"

"For starters," Phillimore gasped, "how about letting me go?"

"You have but to command!"

The professor coughed and wheezed for several minutes, ruefully fingering his aching ribs and tender neck. But it occurred to him he could do worse than confront Professor Moriarty with the monster in tow.

"I suppose," he said at length, "that if we are to work together, you ought to have a name. Mine, by the way, is Phillimore."

"Mighty Phillimore, I greet thee. Though my creator failed to christen me, I am proud to take the family name of Him who endowed me with life. Call me Frankenstein."

Phillimore nodded. *Might as well, that's how most pople refer to the monster, anyway.* He suggested that

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he might want to use "Frank" for short, but the monster thought this a sign of disrespect to his father.

"Since you, Mighty Phillimore, hath adopted me, it is meet that you select a first name for me to carry."

"Very well.'" The only name that came to his mind was Boris. Fortunately, the monster liked it immensely.

"It begins with the same letter as 'beautiful,' " he crowed happily.

"And now, Boris, let us return to the subject of my mission."

The monster nodded its head eagerly. "Tell me the story, Mighty Phillimore, O tell me!"

So Phillimore spun out the history of his adventures, translating certain parts for more ready accessibility to Boris' frame of reference. Thus Moriarty was transformed into a powerful evil magician, and his umbrella became a stolen magic wand.

"Now, Boris, the question is how do we get off this miserable island? And once off it, where do we seek for the nefarious Moriarty?"

"As for that," Boris said, "I should think the powers of Mighty Phillimore would be sufficient to effect both ends."

"Unfortunately, I don't seem to possess the kind of magic tool necessary. An umbrella-wand is all very well and good, but it's no Aladdin's—! Phillimore broke off, leaped to his feet. "Of course! Aladdin's lamp! That's what we need!"

Boris had a vague recollection of such a story when he taught himself to read by browsing through a set of books in another forest of another world. "Was not this lamp the property of a great wizard who dwelled in the land of China?"

"Yes! Now all we need is a ship to take us off this island and —" He paused, wondering why the monster suddenly got to its feet and stretched it hands above its head.

"What in hell are you doing?"

"Look at the sky!" Boris crooned raucously. "So beautiful, the sky above the island, the sky . . ."

A thought started to surface in Phillimore's mind, an important thought, but he couldn't quite catch hold. Looking up to see what thrilled the monster, he beheld the pale tints of morning streaking the night sky.

Sky! Hold onto that word! Sky! What else? The sky above the island. . .

SKY ISLAND!

"I have it!"

"Have what?"Boris asked.

"The way to get off this island! The way to go wherever we want to go. . .at least I *think* so."

The monster shrugged. "I did not doubt that Mighty Phillimore could work the spell, if he so chose."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," the scholar replied, wishing he could get Boris to stop calling him Mighty Phillimore. But perhaps there was wisdom in letting the other adulate him . . .

"Something you said," Phillimore explained, "reminded me of a book I read a long time ago: *Sky Island.* It's all about this boy who travels all the way from Philadelphia to the Pacific Ocean just by finding a magic *umbrella.*"

"And so?" In truth, the monster had no idea what the other was talking about, never having heard of Philadelphia. Yet, Watson-like, he sensed that what Mighty Phillimore needed was a sounding-board, so he urged his putative benefactor to continue.

"You see, Boris, up to now I've only used umbrellas for inter-

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dimensional travel. But if it really responds to the coordinates dictated by the user, why shouldn't it be capable of a simple overland hop in the same world?"

Boris gestured, palms-up, in a "what-can-I-tell-you?" fashion. He didn't know what to tell Phillimore.

But the scholar needed no further prompting. His mind made up, he immediately set their plans in motion. First of all, they went to the beach where he retrieved his jacket and scooped up fresh clams. The two sat and breakfasted off shellfish and coconuts. Boris experienced no difficulty opening the latter, though the clams were something of a trial.

Slaking their thirst at the stream, Phillimore instructed Boris to wait while he went to get Abu Hassen. (He thought the little man would do better being told about the monster before setting eyes on Boris). But Abu Hassan refused to come with Phillimore.

"If you have decided to leave the isle as mysteriously as you came, that is your business, sire. Abu Hassan remains exiled in his eternal shame. I ask only that you do not tell a soul of my whereabouts. Let my memory die when I am perished!"

Promising he would keep his secret, Phillimore bade Abu Hassan farewell and walked away, still wondering what heinous deed the little stinker once committed.

Back at the beach, he instructed Boris to grab hold of the umbrella-shaft. "If you keep your mind blank, I don't think it will heat up." Actually, he had no idea what the thing would do, but the worst that could happen, he told himself, was that Boris would fall off, and Phillimore was still undecided whether the monster's presence was an asset or a liability . . .

"All right, Boris, you ready?"

"Yes, O Mighty Phillimore!"

"Then here we go!"

Affixing the idea in his mind of Aladdin's Lamp and, secondarily, the general direction of China, Phillimore brushed the catch with his thumb and pressed down.

Instantly the umbrella rose in the air. Boris whooped with delight, but Phillimore squinted his eyes shut at the dizzy panorama of surf that suddenly yawned beneath him.

Up, up they went, higher than the clouds. *Easy! A little lower!* Phillimore ordered in panic, gasping for breath. The umbrella gently descended until he was able to adequately fill his lungs. *That's fine. Now—lets go!*

And it did. They zipped across the sky at a speed that terrified the professor, though the monster thought it all great fun. After several minutes of daredevil flying, Phillimore ventured to open one eye, only to shut it immediately when he beheld the ocean far beneath his dangling feet.

He had no idea how long they flew; it seemed an eternity. But eventually, Phillimore sensed the umbrella both decelerating and losing altitude. Daring to look down once more, he beheld a picturesque landscape not so very far below. Close by and coming up fast was a tall, intricately-sculpted pavilion with peaked spires and rosy-tinted minarets.

The umbrella floated closer, closer to the pavilion that shone gold in the setting sun. Leveling with one of the upper windows, a glassless casement that revealed within a mandarin red bedchamber, the umbrella hovered undecided for an instant, then swooped through and set the adventurers gently onto the thickly-carpeted floor. The hood closed au-

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tomatically and the flight-button popped back out with a click.

The monster sucked in a sharp, startled breath, let it out again in a deep, contented sigh.

"O Mighty Phillimore!" Boris breathed. "O benevolent master! O, *wow*!"

Chapter Nine

BILLOWING IN the honey-laden breeze, the scarlet tapestries shyly hid from view the maiden secrets of nook and niche and ceiling. The floor—clad in costly rugs blazoned with dragons and sailing vessels worked in gold wire—bore but two articles of furniture. The first was a lofty wooden cabinet hand-carved with a riot of heroes, handmaidens and holy men; its top was festooned with garlands of sun-bright blossoms in crystal bowls, jade-girdled hookahs, decanters of strange-colored liqueurs made from violet and hibiscus. The other furnishing was the great bed itself, a downy field of luxurious pillowing held by a sturdy frame of gold inlaid with silver, studded with star sapphires, opals, rubies, opulent amethyst, giant pearls, chrysoberyl and bloodstone. The gleaming corner posts supported an ornate canopy of cinnabar from which depended gossamer veneers of silk tied back by gold-rope that, released, would whisper into place the diapahonous stuff so it might shield from untutored eyes those arcane rites practiced by the initiates of that alluring inner sanctum.

Expensive joint, thought Phillimore, *but over-decorated. Rather tacky.*

Jasmine scent heavied the air. From someplace far below, the reedy piping of a seductive melismatic melody wafted upward. Taken altogether, the richly-appointed chamber, the perfumed breeze, the distant sinuous music combined to create a delicious redolence that lulled the senses and hinted at ecstasies bordering on dreams.

But what of that she who dwelled therin? For surely it was none of the rare pleasantries of the place that so transported the newly-arrived monster, but rather the incomparable alluring inhabitant of the vermilion bedchamber who introduced within Boris' innocent breast the unfamiliar condition of transcendent rapture.

It was a damsel slender of form and dazzlingly beautiful, as she were the effulgent sun itslef. Clad in translucent veils of delicate pastels, she languished upon the yielding textures of the bed and there recalled the words of the poet Oubralz:

She shines forth in the night and all our thoughts arise
To seek the nutless meat of her swell almond eyes;
And all men yearn to spread their honey-praise so sweet
Upon the well-bred turn of her well-bathed feet;
When she unveils and all her hidden charms appear,
I shall not crave aught else, unless it be a beer.

Oping her doe-like eyes upon espying the two strangers alight upon the thick pile of carpeting near her bedside, the ineffably lovely damsel parted the curved grace of her coral lips and spake unto them thus: "Suffering Sinbad, who in the howling hot halls of Eblis are *you*?"

Boris began to speak, but Phillimore cut him off. "We're sorry to—uh—drop in unexpectedly, but we're looking for Aladdin's magic lamp."

"Ooh, that bum!" she exclaimed,

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slipping out of bed so she could stamp her tiny foot upon the floor in petulance. "That's all he cares about, is it? I'll give him from lamps!"

"Who are you talking about?" Phillimore asked, confused.

"Aladdin, that's who! That bum, that no-good, I should only get my hands on him! Sending somebody else to pick up the lamp, he couldn't come in person! Me, I should have my head examined, I must have a hole where the brains used to be. Husbands! Did my mother tell me to wait, don't grab the first klutz that comes along? But no, I think I'm so smart! So I get a real jerk, some prize my hubby is. . . without that damned lamp, he'd still be the son of a peasant and maybe I'd be married to a Prince instead of a bum!"

The tirade continued in a similar vein and Phillimore waited impatiently for it to run down. He was uneasy, suspecting that he and Boris had landed in the latter portion of the Aladdin tale, the part in which an evil magician gained possession of the lamp and bade the genie carry the pavilion and its inhabitants to a remote clime where he, the mage, might at leisure enjoy the uses of the lamp, the palace and also the Princess.

Which means the wizard must be close by . . .

The Princess finally stopped vilifying Aladdin long enough for Phillimore to explain that he and Boris had nothing to do with her husband, though it wouldn't be long before Aladdin saved her from the loathsome advances of the sorcerer.

"Actually, if he'd wash his turban once in a while, he wouldn't be so bad," the Princess yawned. "What'd you say your cute friend's name was?"

He introduced her to Boris, but oddly enough, the creature's ardor for the Princess had noticeably cooled. Inscrutably peculiar are the ways of monsters.

"And now," Phillimore insisted, "do you think I might have the loan of your husband's lamp?"

She shrugged disgustedly. "You imagine that if I could get at it, I'd still be here? That old smelly-headed clown of a wizard has it locked up."

"Where?"

"Right there." She waved her hand off-handedly at the carven cabinet. "It's inside."

"All right," said the teacher. "Boris—*fetch*."

"Yes, O Mighty Phillimore!"

The monster lurched over to the cabinet, flung his arms about its midpoint and hoisted it into the air until he was able to shift the balance and raise it over his head.

"Watch out!" Phillimore warned as Boris dashed the cabinet onto the floor. He and the Princess skipped back a few steps while Boris hefted it a second time and again pounded it against the carpeting. On the third try, its doors sprang open.

"I'm afraid the noise will summon the sorcerer!" the Princess exclaimed, dashing forward to scrabble amongst the splinters for the lamp. "Hurry up and help me find it!"

Phillimore joined her. The cabinet was filled with bolts of costly cloth, jeweled bowls, goblets and less-recognizable ornamentalia, but nowhere could either of them see a lamp.

"Look, master!" said the monster, pointing across the floor to a drawer which must have flown out of the cabinet during one of the impacts. Phillimore and the Princess scrambled over and peered within. The drawer contained a single smooth box, polished and painted to depict a

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Shinto temple by a placid lagoon. It had no crack or keyhole, but when the Princess shook it, something inside rattled.

"The lamp!" she exclaimed. "Quick! Open it!"

"I'm *trying* to!" the professor grunted, running his fingers around the corners and edges, seeking a panel to push. "Must be a puzzle box. I used to have one. . ."

"Hurry!" the Princess nagged. "Before the wizard arrives!"

Someone chuckled. "*Too late. I am here.*"

The unctuously menaching voice sent shivery pizzicati down Phillimore's vertebrae. Turning, he saw, looming gaunt and terrible in the doorway, a cadaverous old man with knife-edge features, tangled beard and rock-hard vulpine eyes. The mage wore a wine-red robe embroidered with cabalistic hieroglyphs; on his head there was a wrapped white turban so dingy as to verily cry for an ammonia bath. In one gnarled hand the sorcerer carried a long ebony stick tipped with silver that glowed with an unnatural light.

Phillimore, for once, was at a loss for words. An excuse that he merely wanted to borrow the lamp, though strickly accurate, would seem barely plausible in the face of the destruction which had been wrought upon the locked cabinet. His thoughts raced, but to no purpose, while simultaneously his finger skittered frantically back and forth along the edge of the box, trying to find a section to jog or shift or slide.

"Foolish intruder," the magician gloated, "thou hast displayed uncommon courage and a great want of wits coming here to take possession of mine most valuable treasure. But didst thou truly imagine I would be such a dullard as to flaunt yon puissant artifact wholly unfettered? Bah!"

Saying so, he waved his wand and the wooden box slid out of Phillimore's grip and began to flop end over end toward the wizard. The Princess threw herself upon it to stop its progress, but the wizard just laughed and waggled his wand. The box responded by shooting up into the air; he aimed the wand higher, higher, until the object hovered just beneath the silken-sheathed ceiling.

Now this maneuver was the undoing of the miracle-worker. Standing in the doorway, he could not see the corner of the room where Boris stood. The monster, in turn, had not yet set eyes on the magician, but he commanded a perfect view of the middle of the chamber. Thus the animation of the box riveted him with boundless wonder, and when the thing soared high in the air, Boris could no longer contain his enthusiasm.

"MAGIC! MAGIC!" he crowed, hopping up and down in his excitement and clapping his huge hands. "I LOVE MAGIC!"

The room shook with the monster's jouncing delight. The startled sorcerer took an uncertain step into the room, then turned to discover the cause of the colossal ruckus.

His jaw flapped south. The towering fiend outdid in ugliness the most malevolent afreet that had ever gibbered at him during his most dire evil spells. With a great effort of will, the magician forced his paralyzed vocal cords to work overtime at a scream.

Boris' feelings were deeply hurt. Pounding his hands together in a fit of anguish, he howled, "Curses! Scorned again!" and as he did, his watery eyes rolled in his head and his black lips twisted wide, displaying his great white teeth.

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The spectacle was too much for the magico. His knees buckled and sagged and he slumped onto the carpet in a dead faint. The magic wand slipped from his numb fingers and nestled in the deep pile of the scarlet rug.

As soon as the wand left the wizard's grip, the puzzled box smashed straight down, missing Phillimore by a scant fraction of an inch. The impact splintered one edge and incidentally caused its secret drawer to spring open.

With a delighted utterance, Phillimore swooped up the burnished brass oil-lamp that lay withing. He fished a handkerchief from his pocket and swiped it in long polishing strokes across the convex sides.

Great purple billows of smoke filled the room. The Princess coughed. Boris sneezed.

"*Gesundheit*!" a deep voice pronounced with exceeding distinctness and deliberation.

The smoke cleared. An enormous grinning entity squatted on the floor, wheezing asthmatically and picking its teeth. Fat, dusky, jolly-looking, it had a great bare belly on which was tattooed the likeness of a brown-and-white-striped rabbit. It blinked mildly at the company and scratched its tummy, acknowledging Phillimore with a deferential bow, dismissing Boris with a "Hi, junior!" and a casual hand-wave and wink. It gave the Princess a more protracted scrutiny, but she haughtily deigned not to notice.

More for something to say than out of a need to establish credentials, Phillimore inquired, "Are you the genie of the lamp?"

Nodding, the genie pointed at the picture on his stomach. "Sure. Ain't you ever heard of the genie with the white-brown hare?" He preened proudly. "Actually I just work the lamp nights."

"What?"

"I've got the night shift."

"I don't understand," said Phillimore, surprised. "I thought genies were eternal slaves to the lamps and rings and bottles they live in. . .one genie apiece."

The genie waved a deprecating mitt. "That stuff went out with button-down togas! No more of that getting stuck in a bottle for three hundred years then getting your cork popped by some rumbum sailor who keeps you hopping day and night digging up undressed dames. Phooey!"

"So how have things changed?"

"We have formed G.A.G.S."

"*Huh*?"

"Genies, Afreets and Giaours Society. It's an international union. From now on: eight-hour days, five-day weeks, two weeks off each year. Whaddaya think, the genie game's a picnic?"

"If it's that bad," Phillimore asked, "why do you do it?"

The genie shrugged philosophically. "It's a living."

The amenities aside, the Princess attempted to get control of the genie, claiming royal privilege. But the genie showed her an iron-clad four-point-high clause in the standard contract which all lamp-sprites carry to the effect that no other master than the "rubbee" might be served at one time.

"But stick around, toots, and we'll work something out while I'm off-duty." He winked at her, then turned to Phillimore. "Okay, what's your pleasure? Pleasure?"

The scholar shook his head. "First of all, take care of *him*—" he indicated the wizard, who was just waking

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up—" before he makes a nuisance of himself."

The spirit stashed the sorcerer in a cellar in Zanzibar, then returned to hear the rest of Phillimore's instructions.

"On another world," said the scholar, "an arch-criminal named Professor Moriarty fell into a cataract, the Reichenbach Falls. I was there. So was a detective, Sherlock Holmes."

(He included all the information so the genie would be able to pinpoint the proper planet).

"Now," Phillimore continued, "I have reason to suspect that Moriarty didn't die but instead traveled magically to another world, probably this one. Your mission is to find out whether he still lives and if he does, where he is."

The genie clopped a hand to his forehead. "Hoo-boy! Is that a toughie!"

The professor was surprised. "I thought nothing is too hard for a genie."

"Did I say I couldn't do it?" the other rejoined, somewhat stung. "I just can't give you the usual whisk-zap-your-wish-is-my-instant-command crap. This is gonna take time! First off, I have to find—"

"Never mind all that," Phillimore interrupted, afraid the explanation would take longer than the execution. Doubtfully he asked, "But you think you *can* do it?"

The genie, pride deeply wounded, said stiffly, "I don't *think* I can do it, I *know* I can, willya just gimme some time?"

"How long?"

"Maybe fifteen minutes."

"Oh, that's all right," said Phillimore, relieved that it wasn't a matter of days or weeks. "We can certainly wait that long."

"Damn decent of you," the genie grumped, dematerializing in a disgruntled huff. Thirteen-and-a-quarter minutes later, he returned, task completed, feeling a bit guilty at the surly way he'd spoken to his new master. Afraid he may have discredited the noble profession to which he belonged, he resolved to respond promptly and respectfully to any other demand that might be made of him.

Which explains what happened next.

"I found him!" the spirit eagerly informed Phillimore.

"On this world?"

"Nope. In a place you wouldn't *believe*!"

"Well, in that case," the scholar said, "I have one last task for you to carry out." He nodded in Boris' direction. "He and I must travel to that world."

"*Yessir*!" the genie exclaimed and instantly gesticualated at the pair.

"*Holdit*!" Phillimore yelled. "*We're note quite rea—*"

Neither the genie nor the Princess heard the rest of the sentence. Both James Phillimore and Boris Frankenstein were gone.

Without the umbrella.

Turning end over end, Phillimore aimlessly wobbled and at the same time, purposefully sped on towards Moriarty's world. He felt like a hurtling knuckle-ball in a cosmic cricket match.

Flying via genie was decidedly worse than umbrella travel. Without the comforting reality of the leather handle to grip he had no means of orientation; every direction was simultaneously up and down. His stomach protested. He squeezed his eyes tight to shut out some of the carnival-ride

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dizziness.

He heard Boris howling from some place either far above or below. "O Mighty Phillimore! Why dost thou visit punishment upon me? Canst thou truly conceive that I, who was born unwillingly, am so vile as to deserve this?" The moster moaned piteously, but the sound of his despairing voice soon dwindled and was borne away by the rushing waves of space-time, and Boris was lost in darkness and distance.

Behind his eyelids, the twinkling chaos of the shifting dimensions still danced, but gradually the penetrating glow dimmed and at length, winked out altogether. Suddenly, freefall ceased . . .his feet touched something solid. . .his body jostled against three, four, five beings. . .

A wild chorus of shrieks assailed his ears.

Phillimore opened his eyes.

Onto madness.

Chapter Ten

PHILLIMORE's first thought was that a wire in his brain must have fizzled out with the result that he was nine-tenths blind and ten-tenths looney.

All he could see were lines. Lines and dots. Darting lines, gleaming lines, pulsating lines, bright dots, dots that were nearly invisible, yet more lines and dots and lines and lines and dots and —— — . ——— — . ——

Dimness. Brightness. Some kind of fog disclosed —— — ——— . and concealed other — . ——— — — and everywhere he turned all he saw were bright —— and dim ——— and occasionally a . or two.

Immensity of space. Fluttering. Breeze? Yes—outdoors.

He heard many screams and shouts in an unintelligible tongue, and also, from many directions at once, a strange, high ululation.

Well, he told himself, *this is it, I have gone one hundred percent stark raving bibblebibble bonkers*!

But as a matter of fact, the scholar had lost neither his eyesight nor his marbles. Still, it was a minor wonder that the ensuing events did not serve to place him permanently in a parlor for the perpetually puzzled.

A great multitude of lines surrounded him on all sides. They produced a complicated din to which Phillimore did his best to respond by spreading out his hands in a "noncomprendez" gesture. And he noticed he had no hands.

Also no shoulders. No legs. No feet.

His body was totally askew, it didn't make anatomic sense. He felt its thickness, its length, and with a little experimentation, realized he could move forwards, backwards, sideways . . . but *on* what, *with* what he had no idea. He could hear and he could see, though the latter faculty was reduced to perception of a uniformly thin margin of distance stretching to infinity. Within that expanse, dots and lines shimmered and scuttled everywhere while other, duller lines remained stationary. The mobile configurations appeared to alter somewhat as they hypothetically turned, and surely there was fog to aid his eyes in distinguishing shapes.

The cacophony that the lines made continued. It suggested a simple test to Phillimore. He waggled the place where his jaw used to be. *Yes, I think it's there. . .* Though he couldn't touch it, he was sure he had a mouth. Someplace not far from where he was able to see there seemed to be an opening. He made it gape wide, wil-

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led sound to emerge.

"Hey! What in all good hell is happening?!"

He got no answer, but at least he knew he could still converse in English.

Fat lot of good that does!

Just then, the noisy conglomeration of geometric oddities parted and a much larger shining line approached through the space they quitted. The indecipherable chatter ceased, and there was a hush Phillimore could have sworn was nothing short of deferential.

The large line stopped. The teacher started at it, instinctually certain that it was engaged reciprocally. After a brief silence, the thing rumbled. A pause, then it repeated the sound.

It's trying to talk to me!

"Look, I'm sorry," Philimore apologized, "if you can't speak English or French or German, I'm afraid I—"

He stopped. The shining line was retreating. Sliding smoothly to one side, it rumbled a new series of sounds. Instantly, a quantity of smaller lines, short and rather shady, moved forward, closer, closer, closer to Phillimore. They hedged him in on all sides.

They stopped quite close to the professor and as they did, Phillimore noted their dimensionality, inferred their *shape*. They were not lines after all, but rather a great array of narrow triangles, probably isosceles, and they all had their deadly points aimed at him. They only appeared as lines because he was eye-level with their perimeters. If he could rise straight up and hover over them, he would be able to view them as the triangles they must certainly be from above. . .

Except that in this world, there *was* no up, no above. The only thing Phillimore could see was *edge*, and even the concept of height was a trifle confusing to him at the moment. He knew it existed, but it was difficult to picture it in this two-dimensional place.

Now Phillimore knew precisely where he was.

Flatland.

"Imagine a vast sheet of paper of which straight Lines, Triangles, Squares, Pentagons, Hexagons, and other figures, instead of remaining fixed in their places, move freely about, on or in the surface, but without the power of rising above or sinking below it, very much like shadows—only hard and with luminous edges—"

He remembered quite well the satirical masterpiece by one Edwin A. Abbott, a Shakespearean scholar who turned his avocational delight in higher mathematics into one of the first important works of speculative fantasy. *Flatland*: a world of only two dimensions, length and width; where neither buildings nor people have any perceptible height; where it is so difficult to recognize the shape (and hence, social station) of one's neighbors that the greater portion of university training is devoted to the science of inferring shape.

Though Phillimore saw the thin book on Moriarty's shelf, he never considered it as a possibility. Flatland was no picnic to live in. The angles and points of lower-class citizens were perpetual dangers, and an accidental trip against a square might mean impalement. What was worse, Flatland had an extremely repressive social system, complete with elitist government, castes, police-state authoritarianism and state-engineered executions of undesirables (who were primarily those unfortunate enough to

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be born with slightly irregular sides).

Now why on all the earths would Moriarty pick this lousy spot to come to? Surely, it has no magic, no great instruments of power to—

His perplexed pondering was interrupted by the prodding of one of the isosceles triangles. Because of their narrow angles, these Flatlanders had commensurately tiny brains and thus served as the country's soldiers. Their pointed angles functioned much the same as bayonets; there was no arguing with their insistent nudging. Clearly, they wanted Phillimore to start moving, so he did so.

Where? Why do I rate a military escort?

As they traveled, he noted the land maintained its featureless, heightless character. Every once in a while, he heard the strange ululation he'd noted before and realized it must be some woman's peace-cry. Flatlander women were straight lines, which meant that turned sideways, they presented a near-invisible dot which might skewer a careless citizen who ran upon it. Thus, by law, women in public had to keep up a constant unnerving whine. *Like a belled cat. Or a leper.*

During the journey, Phillimore considered his predicament. Translation to Flatland included adaptation of one's body to the structural logic of that world. He worried lest the return journey fail to restore him to his customary form. Then a thought kicked him: *what return journey?* Moriarty might be two feet away, and he wouldn't recognize him, and how on earth could he possibly find his umbrella when he didn't even know what shape it was presently in?

Suddenly, a great gray motionless line loomed up, stretching as far as he could see to left and right. The soldiers in front paced away and stopped, leaving an opening through which the scholar moved. He entered a dim space, bounded by distant gray lines. It was evidently indoors.

Based on his propensity to incarceration while on his cosmic adventures, Phillimore guessed he was in a Flatland prison. A large angular figure approached and gently nudged him along till he entered a place consisting solely of gray lines.

There was a clang. Phillimore turned and saw he was alone.

"Prison, sure enough," he grumbled, more to keep up his courage than in expectation of receiving a reply. He moved around the confining quarters and observed the omnipresent grayness. Dull lines. Surely the inside of a cell.

Partway along one line a series of thin openings permitted him to look into another space bordered by a more distant dull line. He induced he was staring throught bars into another chamber.

"Anyone there?" he asked, wishing someone could answer in English. He'd never before realized the wonderful property of Moriarty's umbrella to eradicate language barriers for the traveler. Now that he could not communicate to anyone, the—

"Is it possible?" a voice asked eagerly. "Have I the privilege of addressing a noble Spacelander?"

Phillimore almost dashed himself against the wall, so anxious was he to see who, in the other cell, spoke. As he peered throught the bars, a bright shape that might be anything from a triangle through a polyhedron drifted into view.

"You can talk in English!" the professor exclaimed. "Are you a Flatlander or—"

"I am indeed a Flatlander," said the other, dashing Phillimore's ill-

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defined birthing hopes. "I doubt not it is wonderful to you that I am able to converse in the tongue of civilized Spaceland, but perhaps you are aware of the modes treatise I caused to be circulated in your glorious world?"

Yes. When Abbot first had his book published, he pseudonymously signed it as if it were written by a native Flatlander visiting, for the first time, the world of three dimensions:

FLATLAND
A Romance of Many Dimensions
With Illustrations by the Author,
A SQUARE

"Indeed," said the Square, "I am that same lawyer-square who happily, sadly was permitted to spend some time in your astonishing world. Many times have I tried to convince my fellow countrymen that there is a dimension called height , but you see what contempt they hold me and my theory in!"

"Why?" Phillimore asked, a sudden chill numbing the place where he supposed a heart must be. "Where are we? In prison?"

"No," said the Square, "in a mental institution."

Chapter Eleven

TRAPPED!

No umbrella. No way to communicate with his captors. No way out. Phillimore flung himself against the padded lines that comprised the walls of his cell and found they were quite as efficient as any in a three-dimensional asylum. He was caught, transfixed. *Trapped!*

Gossip traveled quickly among the inmates. Soon the Square, his neighbor, was able to explain exactly why Phillimore had been brought to a ward for the insane.

"If you could speak our language," said the Square, "you would be a national hero, rather than a patient here."

"What? *How?*"

"Flatland, you see, is frequently besit by riots and insurrections that never quite come off. Our lower classes, the isosceles triangles who opt for a life of trade rather than military service, are a disgruntled lot. Together with an occasional irregular Flatlander who has somehow escaped execution—these latter are our criminal element—the dreadfully-pointed isosceles often demonstrate against the hierarchy of the polygons and circles, for you must know that the more regular sides a Flatlander possesses, the higher he stands in the social scale. (Our high priest, by common courtesy, is assumed to have at least ten thousand sides, though it would be absolutely impossible for anyone to count that many. While this ruling luminary is called a circle, only God is believed to be a perfect Circle).

"Now nature has so admirably disposed our world's order that the less sides an individual possesses, the fewer angles he has, and the less angles, the less space for brains. By the time we descend to the common isosceles, we are dealing with a remarkably stupid lot. As for *women*—" Here the Square disdainfully sniffed and did not see fit to comment further.

"Because the isosceles are so witless," he continued, "their insurrections have always been an easy matter to put down. They simply do not have any leaders to organize their rebellions effectively. But recently, a grave thing happened here."

"Yes?" Phillimore asked, interested in the story in spite of the fact that he was sure the Square had rambled away from the subject of his own in-

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carceration.

"A Flatlander of mysterious origin suddenly came to the fore some months ago. Though I have not seen him, I hear he presents the aspect of a nearly-perfect circle. This fact, in itself, is highly threatening to our present government. But what is worse, this stranger who nobody seems able to identify has taken it into his head to preach civil rights for women and isosceles class. He wants the ancient practice of painting revived. He demands passage of the Universal Colour Bill—

"I read your book some time ago," Phillimore interupted, "and do not clearly recall these latter things."

"Long ago in Flatland," the Square explained, "pigmentation was discovered. People began making up in all sorts of bright hues, and it suddenly became infinitely easier to recognize one another. This seemed to be a good thing at first, but soon the university arts of sight recognition and shape inference fell into disuse. Irregular figures camouflaged their abnormalities and attempted to marry into the best families! At the height of the horror, a particularly crafty irregular tried to pass the Universal Colour Bill to requre everyone, even priests, to paint. The purpose was to totally demoralize our hierarchy and create a virtual state of—democracy." (Here the Square shuddered). "It was a terrible time in our history, but eventually the rebellion was quashed and the art of chromatism lost. Today it is a crime punishable by instant puncturing to colour in any way!"

The Square huffed indignantly at the memory of trials of yesteryear. Phillimore suddenly was struck with curiosity.

"I say, what kind of figure do *I* represent to your vision?"

"Oh, you are a hexagon," the Square stated deferentially. "It is the lowest class of our nobility. That, plus your praiseworthy action in the center of town, should have made you a national hero but for—"

"Yes, yes," Phillimore prompted impatiently, "but what *did* I do?"

"The tale circulating is that you effectively ended the new rebellion."

"What? How did I do *that*?"

"That mysterious polygon of whom I spoke was holding his penultimate demonstration for all the things inimical to our government which he organized the lower classes to obtain. There were isosceles by the thousands parading before our National Capitol, all demanding their rights—and incidentally the setting-up of this divisive polygon as our new high priest, or Chief Circle. (I doubt not this is his real reason for stirring up so much trouble).

"In the midst of this terrifying rally, just when our state enemy seemed assured of winning, you abruptly and inexplicably descended! Evidently you landed on a number of isosceles, knocking them by accident into other of their brethren, causing puncturing and maiming in great profusion. (Indeed, you were lucky to escape accidental impalement). Since the isosceles class is thoroughly brainless, the disturbance grew into a full-fledged brawl, abetted by the sudden, purposeful appearance of the loyal militia. Within less than five minutes, so I understand, the ranks of the opposition were totally decimated. Only their leader, the polygon, escaped alive!"

The Square paused. Phillimore had a notion he was being regarded with pity by the other. "How ironic," his neighbor murmured after a time, "how very ironic that you had bes-

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towed upon you such an honor, and yet were unable to appreciate it."

"What honor?"

"You, a lowly polygon, were vouchsafed an audience, right there on the street, with the Chief Circle himself! But when he heard you babbling that which appeared to be nonsense, he had no choice, sad as it must have made him, but to commit you to this institution."

Just then, Phillimore heard the click of a cell-door not far away. He turned expectantly, but the Square cautioned him not to maintain any false hope of instant liberation. "That sound is but the delivery of dinner by one of the women who tend us." Again he colored the word "women" with off-handed contempt.

"Perhaps," Phillimore mused, "I could learn the Flatlander language from you. Then I could explain my situation to the Chief Circle and—"

"And you would remain here the rest of your life," the Square interrupted. "I who am a native of this land but visited your dimension and was foolish enough to tell of my discovery of *height* . . . and here I lan- You who indeed hail from Spaceland would fare no better, and perhaps worse."

"Then I could fabricate a story to get me sprung from this place! Will you teach me the tongue?"

"I should be honored. But there is ample time. The Chief Circle only visits us once a year."

Phillimore's hypothetic heart sank into his non-exixtent boots. A *year*! By then, Moriarty could mount a new campaign—for he had no doubt that the Professor was the mysterious polygon—or return to his native world and start his old criminal organization.

The question was: if Moriarty came to Flatland (for what purpose Phillimore still could not imagine), why hadn't he used the umbrella ere this to escape?

The celldoor of the Square clanked open and someone entered. Phillimore smelled a pleasant food odor.

"Let me advise you," said the Square, "to stay out of reach of this domestic. Women are not generally required to utter their peace-cry indoors, but these cells are more roomy than many interior chambers and she could damage you if she were to carelessly bump against you!"

Phillimore was momentarily embarrassed that the Square would speak so disparagingly of the serving-woman in her presence, but then he remembered that she could not understand English and probably thought the other was merely indulging in lunatic ravings.

The Square's celldoor clicked shut and after a few seconds, Phillimore heard a key grind in his own lock. He turned and saw a portion of one gray line slide to one side, revealing another gray line further off. In the intervening space shimmered the straight line of the serving-woman. She turned sideways to pick up the dish of food and he noticed how she dwindled into a point that was almost invisible.

The woman approached with the serving-dish, and Phillimore, following his neighbor's advice, moved away to give her ample turning space. But in spite of this maneuver, she kept coming closer, closer than necessary to give him his supper.

"Here, back off," the scholar commanded, "that's close enough." But she drew nearer, so much nearer that he began to worry that the Chief Circle might have decided it would be cheaper just to finish him off . . .

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"I said back off!" Then he remembered the language barrier. Scurrying over to the bars that divided the cells, he was about to call the Square to interpret to the menacing female when suddenly in his ear there sounded a surprisingly familiar, wonderfully reassuring voice.

"*Shh*!" the "woman" whispered. "*Come, James, come! The game is afoot*!"

Chapter Twelve

"HOLMES!" Phillimore exclaimed. "Is it possible? Can it be you?"

"Shh!" the other cautioned. "We are not yet out of danger." Turning sideways, he began rubbing against Phillimore with a steady, purposeful stroking.

"What are you doing?" the scholar wondered.

"Applying makeup," Holmes whispered. "Without hands, it's a difficult business. Women in Flatland can travel about with little notice paid them. That is why I have disguised myself thus, and propose to do the same to you if you will hold still so I can get the shading even. It's all a matter of refraction of light, and a hexagon may easily appear to be a straight line with a—"

"Yes, I know all about that," Phillimore murmured, following the detective's example and keeping his voice low. "But using makeup is a crime punishable by death."

"Dire instances require dire methods. Your timely arrival broke Moriarty's strength. Now we have but to pursue him to his lair. The Flatland aristocracy has vainly attempted to assassinate him in his home-quarters, but could not locate where he secrets himself. But it was a simple matter of comprehending the rationale of architecture. Putting my theory to a test, I shadowed the Professor and ascertained his location. Unfortunately, he was well protected in his fortress, and till now, I could not move against him. *Turn around, let me do your other sides*."

Phillimore obliged. "Then you have been here for some time?"

"I have. This was the logical place to look."

"But how did you get here sans umbrella?"

Holmes continued to apply makeup as he explained. "When I returned from South America, my brother told me of your quest . . ."

"I've been gone *that* long?"

The linear equivalant of a shrug. "Who knows what amounts of time pass during umbrella flight? At any rate, I made to examine Moriarty's bookshelf as well and reached the sole possible conclusion concerning his whereabouts. Destination decided, I quickly engineered a new umbrella, drawing on my brother's theoretical expertise."

"You have a *new* umbrella?" Phillimore exclaimed. "Where?"

"I took the precaution of strapping it to my body before employing it. Thus, through I cannot see it, I am aware by feel that it is still tied to what ought to be my arm."

A clamor from some of the cells further along caused Holmes to quicken his rubbing of makeup on Phillimore. "They are beginning to wonder where the woman is with their food . . . another few strokes and then we must dare the guards and make good your escape." More rubbing, then Holmes asked Phillimore why it took him so long to come to Flatland.

"I did not reach the same conclusions concerning Moriarty's decision

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at the time he pressed my umbrella's catch at Reichenbach. I assumed he would fly to a world where there was some magic tool handy for the betterment of his nefarious schemes."

"Too studied," Holmes objected. "A man in imminent danger of plunging to his death would hardly mull over the comparative advantage of one or another safety-zone. The destination would surely be a thing of chance, dependent on the random thoughts racing through his brain at that dire instant."

"And what," Phillimore asked, "do you suppose Moriarty was thinking of?"

"Elementary, my friend. It was surely something in the nature of this: 'If I should *land*, I shall be crushed *flat*!' The umbrella merely interpreted as literally as it was able."

Phillimore started to laugh, but Holmes shushed him.

"I've done you as best as the circumstances allow. Quick, James, you must emulate a needle, for that is how you shall appear to the guards . . . the din grows great, we must hurry!"

Holmes hastened through the gap in the gray line and Phillimore followed. He stayed on the detective's heels(?) as Holmes led him down one corridor and up another. There were no stairs, nothing but length, width and more length and width. Occasionally, a shining line moved past them on some errand or another, but Phillimore noted with relief that they were always afforded considerable space to pass. Women, though scorned in Flatland, were evidently much feared.

At length they reached the outdoors. An isosceles on duty at the opening grunted something and Holmes addressed him in the peculiar jargon of the country. Phillimore marveled at his companion's ability to so quickly take on the customs of so alien an environment.

Once outside, Holmes quickened their pace. "We must hurry if we are to catch Moriarty. He is holed up in a fortress out of town. The place is an abandoned weapons-house, which is why no-one thought to search it for the disruptive polygon."

"I don't understand."

"Houses in Flatland, by law, must be built with at least five sides to prevent accidents from colliding with too sharp-pointed an angle. But in the old days, weapons repositories were deliberately fashioned with many points and angles to prevent Flatlanders from approaching too close."

"I see," Phillimore said, "rather like barbed wire surrounding a U. S. Army base."

Holmes, instead of replying, suddenly let out an awful high-pitched screech. Phillimore thought he'd run on a triangle, but then realized there were polygons approaching. The scholar also produced the weird sound that was the peace cry of female Flatlanders.

They proceeded over the countryside, sometimes shrilling the unpleasant sound, sometimes hurrying on in silence. The trip seemed longer than it really was, due to the absence of distinguishing features for the eye to fix upon.

After a time, Holmes cautioned Phillimore to slow his movement.

"We are drawing near. See that confusing line in the distance?"

Phillimore said yes. The line glimmered in odd places and was shaded in others. "An irregular figure, I presume?"

"Indeed. There is a second such wall within this first. I warn you to

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proceed very carefully, very slowly. Bumping against interior or exterior of either might prove fatal. . ."

They crept along, Holmes in the lead. After a time, he indicated a narrow gap in the boundary. "We slip through there." With extreme care, Holmes edged his way up to the aperture and passed through it, stopping while Phillimore did the same and joined him.

"You see," Holmes said in a low voice, "the inner wall does not permit entrance at the same point. We must work our way round till the other door is found. By no means should you go any nearer either wall than we are now."

They started forward again, and this time Phillimore rested lightly against Holmes, turning as he turned, stopping where he paused. They went at a snail's-pace, and more than once, Holmes had to carefully negotiate around some linear obstruction which Moriarty evidently placed in the path to impale anyone foolish enough to speed around the space between the two fortress-lines that were walls.

"Here, now," whispered Holmes, "here it is. The door."

"No need to whisper, my good Holmes," a dry, unpleasant voice said from within. "Come in, come in, I have been expecting you."

The line that was the detective turned to look at Phillimore. "Surely," said Holmes, "he is indulging in braggadocio. Our makeup is indistinguishable from the aspect of women."

A large line emerged from the interior of the fortress and waited some distance away. The thing chuckled nastily. "Excellent acoustics here, my dear Holmes, I have heard your whispered colloquy. However, let me assure you that my identification is no matter of guesswork. Who but my most illustrious enemy could penetrate to my hideaway and decipher my own disguise?" He moved perhaps an inch closer. "I assume the companion by your side is the good Dr. Watson?"

"Do not answer," Holmes warned Phillimore.

"Come, come, there is no reason why we cannot be open with one another," Moriarty said sweetly. "Your time is almost come, and there is some salve in discharging all one's secrets at the last."

Holmes said nothing.

"Well, well, keep your counsel if you must. The silence of kings and beggars, the silence of the grave."

"I had not known you to indulge ere this in idle threats."

"My dear Holmes, surely you know by now that nothing I promise is empty sabre-rattling!" The great line that was the evil arch-criminal suddenly called out, and out of the aperture which was the door to his inner fortress there emerged a half-dozen isosceles triangles, points directed towards Phillimore and Holmes.

"Farewell, dear nemesis," Moriarty said condolently, "I shall miss our war of wits."

The triangles began their slow, purposeful approach.

"What do we do?" Phillimore asked urgently. "Run? Fight?"

"I am afraid," said Holmes grimly, "that neither course will do us much good. Flight will certainly impale us on one of those near-invisible obstructions or else the treacherous walls will pierce us. As for combating a squad of isosceles—"

Moriarty laughed unpleasantly. "I doubt that your expertise with singlestick or baritsu will be of much aid, my soon-to-be-late friend."

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"Maybe you can outtalk the Professor?" Phillimore urged. "Persuade these triangles that—"

"Save your breath," the villainous master-line stated. "These are my hand-picked guard. They are all deaf."

The points were perhaps twenty inches away, and the triangles—as cautious about the fortress walls as Holmes had been—drew steadily, slowly closer and closer.

"What about the umbrella?" Phillimore shouted. "Wouldn't you like to go back to London?"

"I shall, never fear, I shall. For a good while, I couldn't find the thing, but now I know exactly where it is. As soon as I rearouse this rebellion that you temporarily quelled, and as soon as this world pays me my due tribute, I shall move on . . . just as my soldiers are doing . . ."

Moriarty, dismissing them as lost causes, turned to reenter the fortification.

His soldiers were a mere nine inches away.

"Soon they will charge," said the detective. "There is nothing we can do but meet death stoically."

Phillimore, far from being frightened, was extremely annoyed. *All that effort outwitting Persano, escaping from Johnathan Wild, fighting the troll, and so on and on . . . and it all ends like this!? High adventure—Bah!*

The triangles stopped when they were only six inches off. They quivered for the charge, ready to dash forward and stab Moriarty's enemies . . .

One of them uttered a warlike cry. Their signal.

But before they could charge, another sound drowned out the noise of the officer-triangle.

A deafening smashing, ripping noise behind Phillimore and Holmes stopped the execution in its tracks. The scholar whirled about to see what was happening.

The exterior wall of the fortress quivered and shook, and as they watched the line splintered into fragments that skittered forward and sideways. Something on the other side of the wall punched it again and again, enlarging the hole.

Moriarty turned to see what intruder dared his wrath.

Through the gap in the battered remnant of a wall emerged a gigantic line glowing in peculiar places, dim in others. When the isosceles triangles saw it, they screamed and began to run in three directions: left, right, backward, anywhere but forward where the newcomer stalked.

Two of the triangles collided harmlessly, but before they could part, a third skewered both during its flight; the impaler, in trying to free its point, snapped it off and also died. The fourth and fifth isosceles tried to run around the side of the central building. Each crashed into one of the protrusions of the inner wall, thrashed, and was still.

As for the last triangle . . .

"*Help*!" Moriarty screamed. "~~*Go-back*~~!"

But the terrified triangle rammed directly into the Professor and turned him into a bisected line on the instant. Moriarty choked a single word of hatred at Holmes and with his dying convulsion broke his murdering triangle in two.

Silence. Holmes and Phillimore regarded their savior. It was an enormous line, but the random way in which the light played and fell on its facets suggested it must be an extremely irregular polyhedron.

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And then the stillness was shattered by the grievous wail of the thing that saved them.

"*Curses*!" Boris howled. "*Scorned again*!"

Chapter Thirteen

TKEY ENTERED the weapons-house to seek Phillimore's original umbrella, and as they did, all three carefully circumvented the dotted line that was Moriarty's corpse. As they passed it by, Holmes pointed out the presence of makeup on one length.

"He had to make up because he was an irregular polyhedron, although the abnormality was comparatively slight. But it would have been enough to make the lower classes distrust him if the Chief Circle had found out about it."

Phillimore suddenly stopped, horrified. "I've just remembered something!"

"What?" asked Holmes.

"There is an Ür-Moriarty floating about with an umbrella, victimizing other worlds. Shouldn't he also be stopped?"

The Great Detective sighed. "I see it shall be some time ere I will be able to take up again the fairly mundane business of sleuthing in Baker Street." Again he sighed. "Yet the more I consider the fact that there may be countless worlds on which the circumstances of Victorian England are reproduced, the more probable becomes the conclusion that there shall always be a Moriarty . . ."

Phillimore concurred. Then he asked Holmes how he proposed to find his original umbrella, the one Moriarty snatched from his grip at Reichenbach.

"Elementary. I have ascertained that Moriarty landed in this very fortress. Now he was assuredly extremely disoriented when he arrived and no doubt he relinquished his hold on the umbrella and then could not find it again. In a land of lines and dots, what clue is there to the translated shape of a three-dimensional umbrella?"

"I have thought about it," said the scholar, "and I wonder whether it is possible to track it down at all! It seems unlikely."

"Not in the least," the sleuth demurred. "Moriarty himself hit upon it—probably when our disguises turned his attention anew to the art of painting."

"I don't follow."

"My dear fellow, this is a world in which color is outlawed! All we must needs do is seek the one touch of tint in this gloomy gray pile!"

It took them perhaps an hour of rummaging about to spy the still-startling trace of pastel hues that indicated the two-dimensional presence of Phillimore's incredible umbrella. He nudged it against a wall, not without affection, and managed to grasp the bright line in his mouth, his only means of holding it.

It took them another hour to figure out how to push the button.

Epilogue

SCENE.—*An Arcadian Landscape. A river runs around the back of the glade. A rustic bridge crosses the river.*

A troupe of Fairies enter, dancing and singing. Suddenly in their midst, two men appear. One is short and rather stocky. The other is a giant, with black hair, extremely white teeth and black lips. The Fairies admire the latter personage emormously, though one or

(cont. on page 71)

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A sense of mischief? Or

A SENSE OF DISASTER?

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

I.

BRAT, as usual considerably bruised, but eyes alight with creative pleasure, sat and worried the length of broken dead limb out of the pile of kindling against the cave wall, then crawled stealthily to the fire where Ak and Rill sat gnawing on the remains of supper.

Brat shoved the splintered end of the stick into the fire.

Ak was eyeing the rolling hills visible from the cave mouth. There was a herd of something feeding there in the distance; but, in the drizzle, among the scattered low trees, with the sun about to set, it was hard to tell—

Snap!

Snap!

The resinous dry kindling caught and flared.

A bright-red coal landed on Ak's thigh. As he brushed it off, out of the corner of his eye he could see the stream of sparks and flame whip through the air.

Rill screamed and grabbed at her hair as Brat toddled past proudly waving the popping flaring length of kindling.

Ak sprang to his feet, snarling.

Brat eyed the carefully hoarded stack of kindling, back where the rain couldn't reach it. He brandished the flaming brand and headed for the pile.

Rill screamed.

Ak roared, "Nuh fla da! Nuh! *Nuh!*

Brat scowled defiance and hurled the brand at the pile of kindling. He let go at the wrong moment, and instead of hitting the pile, the stick landed only halfway there, on the stone floor.

Rill grabbed the unlit end, and flipped it toward the front of the cave.

Brat screamed in frustration, grabbed Rill by the leg, and bit her.

Ak, eyes glittering, grabbed Brat by the hair, gave a deafening bellow, and jerked him away from Rill.

Brat screamed in outrage.

Rill, sobbing, banged into the stone wall of the cave.

Brat grabbed Ak and tried to bite *him*.

Ak, his face contorted, held Brat painfully close to the fire.

Brat screamed.

Ak listened to the scream change from rage to terror, and jerked Brat back onto the cool stone.

Brat screamed and babbled.

Ak said, his voice penetrating, "Nuh fla da! Nuh fla da! Nuh fla da!"

He punctuated his words with slaps.

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Brat reeled and staggered, screamed, sobbed. Eyes flashing in terror and defiance, he stared at Rill. His eyes commanded, appealed, pleaded.

Rill, face grim and unresponsive, felt carefully of her hair, looked at the blood running down her leg, and watched grimly as Ak, with stinging slaps, continued the punishment.

"Nuh fla da! *Nuh fla da!* NUH FLA DA!"

Brat's gaze changed.

Reeling, dazed, he stared at his father.

"Nuh fla da?"

"Nuh fla da!" said Ak. He pointed at the pile of kindling and unleashed a torrent of words. He pointed at the fire, the kindling again, the back of the cave, with its piles of soft straw, skins, and tools, the cave mouth, the drizzle outside, then he looked back at Brat.

"NUH FLA DA!"

Brat looked sleepy.

"Nuh fla da," he said, as if considering the matter. Then, somewhat proudly, "Nuh fla da." He headed for the back of the cave, and the pile of straw there that was his own. On the way past Rill, he paused, looked at her, and spoke knowledgeably.

"Nuh fla da," he said.

"Nuh fla da," she replied.

He nodded, went past, and threw himself on his pile of straw.

"Nuh fla da," he murmured, and fell asleep.

II.

MISTRESS BRYTE finished shaping the dough into loaves as, from somewhere back toward the cow barn, the sound of screams came to an end. She let her breath out with a sigh, tucked a loose strand of hair back in place, and held her mind on mentally re-

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peating the memorized passage of scripture, feeling calm return to her as she did so.

John Bryte's voice reached her dimly from somewhere outside, sympathetic, but with a hard unyielding quality:

"No, my lad, not then, or anytime . . . I know how it is . . . But *there is no fireplace or chimney in your little shed.* It could have set the field afire. That would have burned the barn, and the house, *and maybe us.* Once it started, we could never have stopped it. We would be driven out! We would have *no home*, do you understand? *No home!* . . .Now go clean up that mess, and never do it again or I will whip you till you cannot stand. *We can't fool with fire!*"

There came a padding of small feet past the door, and low a voice murmuring, "Wind could catch it . . . Water. Put water on it . . . Stone won't burn. Keep it in stone. Is safe in fireplace . . . Not let it get out fireplace . . ."

The voice went on past.

Mistress Bryte sighed, and got back to work.

III.

SAM MARKHAM, around in back of the woodshed, where the charred stubble reached all the way to the plowed field, had the leather strap in his hand and the screaming boy by the arm.

"Now get it through your head; *you don't play with fire!* —Do you hear me?"

The boy, tears streaming down his cheeks, looked at his father. His "*Yes!*" came out hastily, as Markham readied the strap for another blow.

"It could," said Markham, "have burned down the shed, the carriage house, and maybe the barn. And if I hadn't happened to plant this garden in a different spot this year, it *would* have! Once it starts, you can't control it! You can't burn that stubble unless the wind is right, and the ground is right, and you've run some furrows to stop it if it heads for Peters's place, and you've got somebody ready just in case, after all, it *jumps* . . . Say—Peterses are away and only the Becker boy comes over to take care of their stock. —What do you think would have happened *if it had gone for Peters's?*"

IV.

MABEL LACKER looked around at young Stanley, who was wandering around the kitchen at loose ends. So far today, he had dumped his toys out of his toy box, holding the box over his head so everything hit with a crash and scattered all over the floor; refused to pick things up; got up on the dining room table, where she'd put the mail, and torn the cover off of *Liberty*; tried to climb up on the chandelier in the dining room; and now she had the impression he was working up toward some horrible climax even she couldn't imagine. According to an article she'd just read, you shouldn't hit them, you should "guide the child lovingly but without coercion; violence breeds violence; to be attacked by the parent is the ultimatic traumatic experience . . ." She *did* think Al was too rough sometimes, but just lately—.

Little Stanley reached up on the white enameled top of the stove and took down the box of kitchen matches where she had set them after lighting the oven. He looked at her with a tentative little smile and a glint in his eye.

She took one quick step, the remembered advice to "use the superior

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resources of the adult to distract the child" all but blotted out by an upsurge of savagery she hardly understood herself—but then the familiar position of the hands of the clock on the wall over the stove briefly caught her attention.

Five o'clock. Captain Kong came on the radio at five. Little though she cared for the captain's deep voice and the sickly piping soprano of his junior assistant, still, he *did* provide fifteen minutes of blessed relief every weekday afternoon.

"Stanley," she said craftily, "it's time for your *program*. Go turn on the radio, dear."

Stanley hesitated, then started for the living room, and she deftly wrenched the matches out of his hand on the way by.

He stopped, defiant.

"Captain *Kong* is on," she said, turning him toward the living room.

A faint look of perplexity crossed his face, then he went on out the door toward the living room.

She looked after him with a sense of relief, but also with a faint impression of something missing, something out-of-focus. She looked around, frowning.

On the stove, the water began to boil. The red needle of the thermometer in the oven door showed that the oven was hot. She shrugged, and got back to work.

From the other end of the house came the deep voice of Captain Kong:

" . . . boxtops from roasted toasted Choc'm-Hulls and I will send you my exclusive official signet ring, which pops open to reveal a secret spy mirror . . . "

V.

STANLEY, baffled, looked at his wife.

"Richie did *what*?"

Sue Lacker said grimly, "Tried to set the draperies on fire."

"What did he try to do *that* for?"

"I don't know, but he had your lighter, and he *tried to set the drapes on fire!*"

"Uh—They didn't burn, did they?"

She stared at him. "Stanley—"

"Did they burn, Hon?"

"No. They're woven glass, or something, but *he was trying to burn them!*"

"Well—where is he now?"

"Watching the TV."

"I don't see that there's anything I can do. I mean—what *could* I do?"

She looked at him. "But what do *I* do if he grabs that lighter again and gives me the look he gave me today?"

"What look?"

"I don't know. Hellish. Defiant. *Willful*. An I'm-going-to-do-what-I-feel-like-and-you-be-damned look."

"You've overstrained, Hon. Did you—ah—did you punish him?"

"*Punish* him? I hit him as hard as I could, but he *laughed*."

For an instant, something seemed to twist inside of him, a powerful impulse that rose almost to the point of action. He took a step toward the living room, then stopped. What next? Where was the script? Who had the scenario? He paused.

She looked at him hopefully.

He shrugged.

"Look, Hon, he didn't actually do any *damage*. I'll get rid of the lighter. And—ah—you keep him watching the TV. I don't want to give him a trauma. And—uh—if he makes any trouble, I'll talk to him, try to reason it out with him *somehow*."

He went out, and she stood there, frowning.

—Just exactly what would happen if everybody tried to use unaided *reason* in a situation like this?

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VI.

THE FASCINATING FIGURE, a torch in one hand, sprang into the floodlights.

"They're unresponsive! They don't care! They don't relate! The world they have built is an evil world! There are wrongs in that world! Poverty! Want! Hunger! Coercion! They are corrupt! Their *world* is corrupt!

"I say, Burn it! *Burn* that world! Burn it down!

"Go out from here and *burn!*

"Burn!

"*Burn!*"

They glanced at each other.

Why not?

They obeyed.

VII.

ADRIS KAMMER leaned on the hoe in the hot sun, and sniffed suspiciously.

Smoke.

Eyes narrowed, he looked around. The wind was from the east. There—there came a thin wisp of it, from behind the chicken house.

After all that senseless convulsion, here he had a case of it *in his own family!*

Sandra Kammer came running at the sound of the screams, then stood by, bitterly unresponsive.

"I *told* him not to play with fire. Oh, I wish they hadn't blown up the TV station. He's driving me crazy this summer!"

VIII.

AS THE emergency generator worked the air-conditioning to strain the smoke out of the air, General Myles looked at Senator Manx, and they both glanced at the President, who looked the professor over with the expression of a man testing one of the new coins by bite and ring to see if it was genuine.

The professor looked back stolidly, and finally the President said, "You understand, we've had a certain amount of trouble lately from theories that didn't work?"

"I'm aware of it," said the professor drily. "Two walls almost fell on me on the way here. The first was accidental, and the second was an ambush."

"Now, then. Let's have this theory of *yours* again."

"It's very simple. The world is a setting for a collision between man's idea of Right on the one hand, and the forces of Nature on the other. The only way a man can hope to contend at all is through discipline—self-discipline in the individual, and often discipline as a member of a group. The foundation of discipline is laid early, when the child has a collision with the parents, the child wanting something the parents *can't* allow."

Senator Manx glanced at his watch. General Myles frowned. The President said, "This is obvious."

"Certainly. It's *simple*. And in a natural state, this collision is all but inevitable. But, it can't take place if the parent can prevent it *simply be setting the child in front of a* TV *set.*"

The general looked around. "Then what happens?"

"You can't build on quicksand. The child grows up without discipline, can't understand the adult world, under the complexities, is *based* on discipline, sees the flaws but not the achievements, and has his collision with authority *later*." The professor gestured toward the outside.

The President said, "And what do you suggest?"

"That no entertainment shows for children be permitted. It will then, in the nature of things, be all but *impossible* to prevent the clash and the as-

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sertion of parental authority. There are three possible results. First, the parent may, theoretically, be overwhelmed by the child. Second, the parent may overreact and maim the child. Third, the parent may discipline the child properly. The third response is self-strengthening, generation after generation, whereas the first two tend to destroy either the child or the family unit. We can therefore rely on the third response to regenerate the basic discipline of the race."

The President looked thoughtful, then harrassed, and then smiled. "We will give this matter all the careful consideration it deserves."

The professor beamed, bowed, and went out.

The three men glanced at each other.

The President said, "General, after we get the remains of this mess cleaned up, we will have to plan a campaign against these TV stations and their children's hours."

General Myles smiled. "It might not be a bad idea, at that."

Senator Manx laughed. "But hard to maintain when the Emergency Powers Act runs out."

"H'm. Yes. Well, now, as I understand it, the situation on the Coast is finally quiet, is *that* right?"

"Yes, sir," said the general. "We have to expect a little more trouble—there's bound to be. But we finally have the upper hand, and—"

IX.

ELLEN FERRIS dropped little Cyrus Dane into the 3-V seat.

"There, you little stinker. Shut up, and watch that until your Mommy and Daddy get home. Then if you want to burn the place down, it's *their* problem!"

X.

MARCIA ANGIO said, "Listen, Honey, this kid of yours is a firebug."

Hank Angio tossed his jacket onto a floating seat with built-in antigrav unit. The seat bobbed up and down, and drifted slowly across the room. He eyed it sourly.

"99,999,99 inflationeros for *that* thing. Was I out of my head? If you sneeze, it drifts. If a breeze blows on it, it drifts. When you sit down in it, it bobs up and down and drifts. How is that any better than if it had *legs* on it?"

"Your little boy," Marcia reminded him. "The kid built a fire under the 6V."

"It's insured. *Man*, is it hot out there today!"

"Honey, I stopped him, *but*—"

"Was the 6V *on*?"

"No-o."

"There's your answer. Put it *on*, then he'll watch it. He can't burn it up while he's watching it." He gave a little laugh. "He can't do *anything* while he's watching it."

"He needs a good licking."

"That's my idea, too." He shrugged. "But did you see that show, *The Five Hundred Days*, last night? They say the Eruption was caused by spanking the kids back then. They've got the scientific proof."

"I don't want to argue with science," she said, "but I'm his mother, and I say he needs *something*, and *I* think it's a good licking."

"Okay, Hon. Try the 6V on him first. If that doesn't work—"

XI.

NATE MANNETT IV experienced the flowers, the bees, the birds fluttering gently, and the clouds drifting all about him. Ice cream cones of all flavors floated through the air, and he

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willed one to approach. It was strawberry, delicious, and as he ate it, he grasped a popcorn ball drifting just within reach. Happy laughter was all around him.

Nate Mannett III frowned upon him.

"I don't know, Sheil, it doesn't seem right to go out and just *leave* him here, glued to the alsens."

"If we shut it off, he'll cry. He's more and more cross, lately. He acts as if he hates the world. This is the only way I can keep him quiet. He *insists* on it."

"Well—if he *insists* on it—"

XII.

PROFESSOR WEIDENBERG examined the class uneasily. He had a sense of having sometime lived through this same scene before, and once was enough. But he did not care to back down.

The unkempt unruly lot looked back at him with cynical disdain, as if watching a cheap performer at a sideshow.

Weidenberg said quietly, "I am recognized as an expert in two disparate fields, gentlemen. —And ladies. One is subnuclear physics."

Someone, somewhere in the room, gave a low laugh. "'*Disparate.*' Get that."

Someone else gave a lazy whistle.

The class sprawled in the chairs, watching, waiting, grinning easily.

The professor took off his jacket, revealing chest and shoulders like a gorilla, and a holster under his left shoulder. He tossed the jacket over a chair.

"The other field," he said judiciously, "is combat." The gun jumped into his hand, flashed back and forth from hand to hand as if it had a life of its own, and disappeared into the holster. "Now, gentlemen, I dislike narcotic cigarettes. They have a distracting effect. Ladies, extreme skirts and blouses, and—ah—minibikinis—also have a distracting effect, and really aren't necessary." He leered, and a kind of hair-raising lustful bestiality radiated from him.

One of the girls attempted a coy giggle, but it turned a strangle gasp halfway through.

For an instant, there was a kind of live menacing force in the room.

The class sat up.

The professor began to teach, forcefully, demanding total attention, dominating the class.

They went out exhilerated. He sucked in a deep breath, put on his jacket. A colleague, who had come in partway through, approached him in awe.

"Charlie, with what you've got—*whatever* it is—you could do anything—go as high as you want!"

"M'm," said Weidenberg, with no special enthusiasm. "Thank you, Steve."

"I don't know what it is—you seem like anyone else until you get going, and then—I don't know—*something* happens!"

"How does this latest batch seem to you?"

"The students?"

"The students."

His colleague's eyes shifted. "Brilliant . . . Ah—but—well, to tell the truth, that's what I wanted to see you about . . . M'm . . . I'm having a little—well, I guess it's a discipline problem . . . . My fault, I suppose, but—"

Weidenberg nodded moodily. Who could expect a generation weaned on electronic miracles to be thrilled by classwork? However, he listened patiently, and groped for an answer.

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XIII

GENERAL DEAUVILLE led the Guard in the final attack on the Central Power Station, came through it with nothing worse than a poisoned dart through the left arm, woke up in a field dressing station that same night, and was in conference with the President the next morning.

"It was close," said Deauville. "Another twenty-five minutes, and they'd have had the cap off the regenerator, and smashed the leads to the helix. The experts don't agree on what would have happened then. At best, the whole East Coast power net would have gone out, and maybe the Midcontinent net, too. —That's the *best* that could have happened. At worse, we'd have had a hydrogen flare that might have vaporized up to thirty percent of the continent. When we got these birds, and put the facts to them, *they laughed.*"

"They didn't believe it?"

"They knew it already, *and it didn't matter to them!*"

The President nodded.

"I had a visit this morning from one of our greatest subnuclear physicists. Last night, trying to get some perspective on this, I was reading the memoirs of a predecessor of mine, who went through a similar convulsion. I'm meeting with the legislative leaders, and certain technical experts, this afternoon. I don't know if we'll get the answer, but, personally, I am prepared to try practically anything."

XIV.

BUCKMINSTER SIEGEL, JR., massaged his sore hand, left his son sobbing in the bedroom, and approached his wife, who was sobbing in the kitchen.

"Well," he said angrily, "I gave him something to think about, but if I have that to go through every night when I get home, I'm getting something to do it with besides my hand. What did he do besides scorch the couch?"

"Oh," she said, "he was *awful* today! He put that New Martian lizard into the fish tank, and the lizard ate up the fish, and then drank so much water it burst, and he was screaming and howling, and kicked the dog in the ribs, ran into the rec. room and dumped the alsens over the parapet into the swimming pool, with the cord still plugged in, and this greenish gas bubbled up out of the pool, and when I pulled the plug out, I got a *terrible* shock. And then he—"

"One of these short-handled flyswatters *might* do the trick, or an initiation paddle—"

"If only," she said, "I could just sit him in front of the alsens. That's what they *used* to do, back before the Convulsion. Buck, why *can't* I?"

"Phew," he said, and looked around for something to eat.

"*Why?*" she said.

"Huh? Oh, I read about it somewhere. When they uncorked the outside cap to the Central Power Station, there was an escape of particles that did something to the ionization belt—changed the charge in it, or something. That affects the transmission. *Now* when a kid lives the alsens, he gets a terrific headache. 'Incompatible signal,' they call it. As a matter of fact, the thing gives *me* a headache every now and then. He dumped it in the pool, you said?"

She took a deep shuddering breath, and nodded.

"There's a rumor," he said, "that the higher ups figure the sets *caused* the Convulsion, and so they *made* them incompatible on purpose, by changing the signal."

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"How could the *sets* have caused the trouble?"

"As I heard it, the idea was that the kid had to learn what the limits are—how far he can go—and he keeps pushing, taking more space till finally the old man just can't stand it anymore, and clobbers him, and then he knows where the limits are, the clobbering gives him an idea what happens when you go beyond the limits, and the whole thing gets stored away so when his own kid goes beyong the limits it doesn't leave him feeling helpless—he knows what to do, because he's already seen it done. But if the kid never has the collision, because the old man isn't around, or because the kid gets stuck in the alsens every time he gets mean, he doesn't get clobbered, doesn't get any idea what it's like, doesn't have it stored away when his own kid acts up, and maybe thinks there aren't any limits, anyway. He's got no idea what it feels like to go too far and have the roof fall in. Instead, he gets the idea that if he gets mean, *entertainment* will be produced for him. That's the way it's always been before."

"But is it *true*?"

"Don't ask me. Is there anything to eat in this place?"

XV.

"IGOR," said Marianne Fitch, her lips compressed into a thin line, "he put the cat in the matter converter."

Igor Fitch turned around slowly in the control seat, and stared at his son. "He put the *cat* in the *matter converter*."

Little Tod stuck out his lower lip and scowled belligerently. He sucked in a deep breath and his voice came out loud and clear:

"I *want* cat in verter!"

The elder Fitch swore, unbuckled the harness, and started for young Tod. "I *told* you, damn it, to be *good* to that cat! And I told you *never to get near that converter!*"

Tod felt his power flow through him, and raised his voice:

"I *want* put cat in verter! I *put* cat in verter. When I want, I go get cat *out* verter!—*No put hand on Tod!*"

The room whirled. There was a flash of pain, and another and another.

He screamed in rage, commanding the universe to yield and obey.

The stinging blows continued, one following the other in merciless succession.

He summoned his servant, the extension of his will standing there against the bulkhead, to come at once to his aid.

"You deserve it," she said.

The screams of rage become howls of pain, of mortification, shock, and a realization of disaster, then pleas for mercy. At length, he wound up in his cot, sobbing:

"Verter *eat* cat. Verter eat Tod I go near verter. Oh, I not want verter eat cat! I not go near verter. Not till I bigger. I not go near verter . . . Not go near verter . . . Not . . .Not go near verter . . . "

Out in the control room, Igor Fitch drew a deep shuddering breath.

"That cat was going to have kittens. When he killed that cat, he killed it and all the succeeding generations."

"We have more in stored embryos."

"Yes, and you know how uncertain *that* is. But we'll have to try to bring another along. Where we're going, you *need* animals to help you."

She stroked his head, said, "Are you sorry we left? I mean, left civilization?"

He snarled, "Civilization! Yes, I'm

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sorry to leave civilization. But connected up with it, like Siamese twins, is artificality. Soft, easy, cunning traps. You know what some of the fools want to do now? They want to rig gravitor beams so that if somebody jumps out a window, he'll float gently to the ground. And they've come out with this thing they say corrects the distortion in the alsens signal, so the 'harrassed parent' can stick the kid in it and forget him. You know the name of this thing? 'Cuddlywomb. *Nuts!* The reason they had the last two blow-ups was that people wanted *out*. Into *reality!*"

"There, there," she said.

"*Agh,*" he snarled.

She smiled at him, drew him close, but his mind was groping for a meaning just out of reach.

He nodded.

"That's it. Nobody *wants* pain. But you don't even draw breath till you get slapped. And after a long enough time without *any* pain, *any* discomfort, pleasure isn't pleasant, because there's no ground for comparison. A system aimed at *eliminating* all pain and all discomfort invites revolt, because it eliminates *enjoyment* in the process."

He looked at her, wondering why she looked so particularly alluring now, after this awful day. He checked the controls, scanned the instrument panel, then locked the board for the night. Each day, he rehearsed the approach, practised the landing procedure, which he would need very soon, and practised the emergency routines, which he hoped he would never need. If there should be trouble, the alarm would bring him on the run, and he hoped he would know what to do. He got up, and they left the control room.

As the ship became quiet, and the minutes ticked past and grew into hours, there swam onto the viewscreen a bright pinpoint, that evolved into a dot, a silver coin, a white-and-blue sphere, and finally, a glowing world. It waited there, serene and unpredictable.

Little Tod, up and traveling around when he was supposed to be asleep, stood wide-eyed, watching the screen. Some exceptionally powerful emotion moved him.

"*Daddy!*"

Igor Fitch woke up and mumbled, but Marianne, out of long training, got there first.

"Oh, Igor, *look!*"

He arrived, half-awake, growling, "*Now* what? What did he do now?" Then he saw the screen. As he stood raptly watching, his son's urgent voice reached him.

"I *want!*"

His wife's voice said soothingly, "There, honey, Mommy and Daddy will get it for you."

Igor looked at his wife, then at his son staring wide-eyed at the screen.

"Don't let anybody fool you, Kid," he said gruffly. "There's a limit to what Mommy and Daddy can do. If you want anything like that, *you* have to get it *yourself.*"

Tod stuck out his lower lip.

On the control panel, the proximity warning woke up and went off.

Igor unlocked the board, shut off the warning, and swung into the control seat. Now, he asked himself, was there anything he *could* check that he hadn't checked at least half-a-dozen times already? Never mind what the ship-preparation experts were supposed to have done. Had *he* done it, himself?"

So far as he could remember, he had covered every item on his checklist, and had made his check-list in-

(cont. on page 131)

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Lisa Tuttle has already developed a reputation for strong stories which deal with human responses to the unusual. In her latest for us she tells us about an astronaut, his autistic child, and his wife, who meets–

THE BIRDS OF THE MOON

LISA TUTTLE

Illustrated by TONY GEESON

THE BIRDS who live on the moon have heads very like the heads of men; but they are earless, and their faces, which wear no expression, look curiously dead. They fly slowly, heavily, through the airless night and perch alone on bleak rock and in crater walls.

Amalie woke suddenly, as if cold talons had closed about her wrist. Her husband's slow, regular breathing filled the room like moonlight: he slept. She turned her head on the pillow to look at him, and froze at the sight of his open eyes. They were open, but saw only in his dreams.

Before he went to the moon her husband had slept like any man, with eyes closed. Sometimes Amalie knew that her husband had never come back from the moon: as surely as the men who had died there he had left the most essential part of himself up there, circling in space. And now, his eyes stared perpetually beyond her, at the harsh landscapes of the moon.

Amalie moved on the bed, away from her husband; slid to the edge and got up. He did not stir. She was wide awake, almost alarmingly so. She rarely felt so awake in the daytime, and she wondered if perhaps she were only dreaming she was awake: that would explain the peculiar quality of her awareness.

In the hall she paused before Carmen's door, then opened it quietly. The room was brightly lit by the moon: the curtains were open and the window cranked ajar. Amalie scarcely glanced at Carmen's empty bed; almost without needing to think she had crossed the room and was at the window. She pushed it open and leaned out. The driveway glittered like snow in the moonlight, and the grass that edged it looked black.

And there was Carmen, in a white nighgown that reached to her ankles, her feet bare, her arms outstretched, whirling around on the lawn in a silent dance. Her face was solemn, the dance a ritual of madness. Her mother hesitated, her palms flat against the window sill, ready to climb out after her. Then she turned away and went through the house to the front door.

"Carmen!" Her voice shivered the still air. The little girl turned her face away from the flat, silver face of the moon and stopped dancing. Eyes down, moving like a badly-made doll, she went into the house. Her mother tried to touch her, but Carmen shrank away, drawing herself close to

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the wall, her body repelling human touch. Her mother, knowing this response, let her hands drop like useless wings to her side.

Her husband had turned over in bed.

"Jim?" she said. The room was silent; she could not hear him breathing.

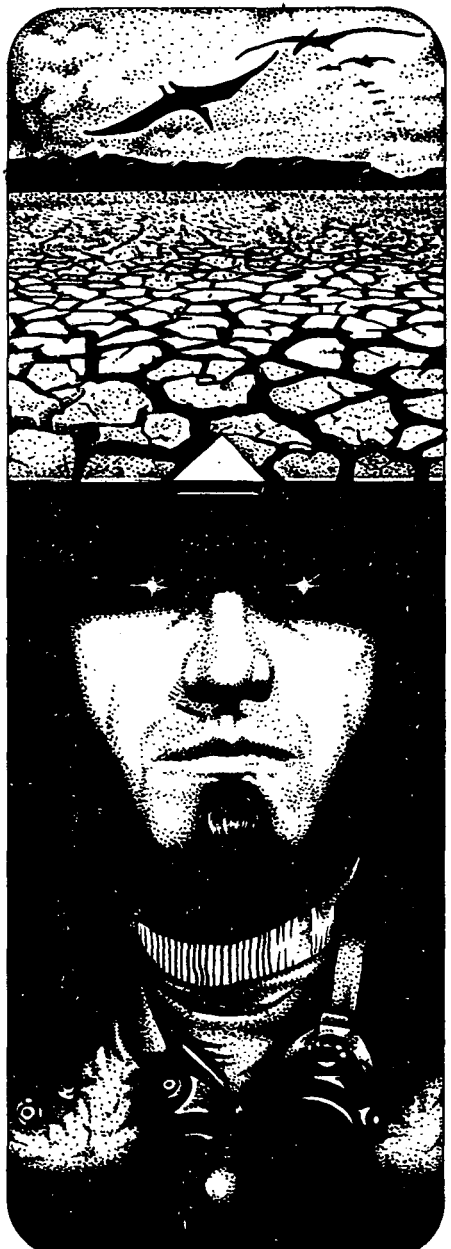
"Jim?"

He started to breathe again, and Amalie let out her own breath. She wondered if he were awake and pretending to sleep. She got back into bed. They slept back to back, a wall of air between them.

The birds who live on the moon are built in a peculiar fashion: large and heavy-bodied with wings small for their size. When at rest their wings fit into their sides and seem to vanish. Their feet are large, ugly, and strong: their grip is so powerful that the birds can sleep in any position—upside down, projecting outward—so long as the rock they anchor themselves to is firmly fixed.

Carmen set the table for breakfast, putting down the place mats and the silverware and the napkins, the plates, the cereal bowls, a glass for milk and a smaller glass for juice, and coffee cups in saucers for Daddy and Mommy. Carmen moved in metronomic rhythm, taking the same number of steps on every trip to the table, working out her movements as if they were the steps to a boring but precise dance number.

Amalie scrambled eggs and watched her. Jim came in, dressed for work. She thought she remembered that he had told her he wouldn't have to go in today; that they didn't need him today; but she didn't ask. He would only tell her she was wrong. And did it matter? He could go where he wanted, tell her what he liked.



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"Sleep well?" she asked.

"Sure. I'll just have coffee."

She wondered if he would go to the Center today, just as if reporting for work. She wondered if that were where he spent most of his time. Or perhaps he would go into Houston, to the museum with the moon rocks and the capsules scarred by space and reentry and now outfitted with dummy astronauts. She remembered the first time she and Jim had been taken on a tour of NASA, when he had first been transferred to Houston, before he had even told her there was a possibility he might go to the moon (but she had guessed)—she remembered a field, part of which had been covered for some reason with those chalk-white oyster shells so popular for covering dirt roads and driveways and parking lots.

Their guide, joking, had pointed to this section of field and said it was the simulated moonscape used in training astronauts to walk on the moon. Jim had leaped off the side of the road onto the shells and pulled a stray weed that pushed up through them. "Yes, Houston Control, there *is* life on the moon!"

She thought about it now, that small stretch of dead-white shell and rock surrounded by Texas fields. She thought of Jim standing there and wishing for the moon.

"You should eat breakfast," Amalie said. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

"I know. I'll have coffee."

Carmen was taking Cheerios out of the box in handfuls and layering them into her cereal bowl.

"Carmen, you want some nice scrambled eggs?"

Carmen shook her head three times sharply back and forth and went on with the business of the Cheerios.

Amalie looked at the eggs with dislike. She was never hungry in the morning; Jim rarely wanted anything more than coffee, and Carmen wouldn't be interested in anything else until she had finished preparing and eating her Cheerios—by which time the eggs would be cold. She wondered why she bothered, and scraped the steaming eggs into the disposal.

"Working today?" she asked Jim. He had ignored the place set for him at the table and was leaning against the wall, blowing on his coffee.

"Some stuff to do, yeah," he said. "I may be back for lunch."

"I'll be out with Carmen until two." Amalie poured herself a cup of coffee and watched her daughter bathing the neatly stacked oat circles with milk. "Anything special you want for dinner?"

He shook his head, sipped his coffee.

She went on in the same tone, "You were sleeping with your eyes open again."

"Bullshit."

"Jim, I saw you."

He shook his head.

"I did."

He shrugged and put down his coffee. "Well, so what? I don't believe you, but so what? So I've taken to sleeping with my eyes open—it shouldn't keep *you* awake; it's not like I was snoring.

"It's eerie."

"It's eerie. I find it even eerier that you should keep waking up and catching me at it." He turned his head, dimissing her. "Daddy's going to work now, baby girl."

"Goodbye, Daddy," said Carmen. She did not look up from her cereal when she spoke, and Amalie felt a deepening of her depression. Every morning she took Carmen's response as a signal of how the day would

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go—when she looked at her father and spoke it would be a good day. When she did not look at him, it would be a bad day.

"Bye bye," said Amalie listlessly. Her lips and Jim's bumped like passing strangers.

"Bye bye," he said. "Bye, bye, Carmen."

The birds who live on the moon are black and white. The moon is black and white, the landscape stark and pure. These birds have no conception of color; they know only darkness and light. The brilliancy of unhindered sunlight; the blackness of a cold night. They sleep in black shadows cast by white rocks. Their black eyes, pupilless, soulless, have no lids; are always staring.

In the supermarket the colors screamed at her, the bright boxes, jars, cans and bottles seemed to leap off the shelves, daring her, taunting her, begging her to choose, to buy. They strained towards her in the blue-ish flourescent light, and the sound of cash registers and Muzak, the nearness of other people, scraped at her nerves. She felt the familiar beginning signals of a migraine: the sense of dissociation, the difficulty she had in focusing her eyes to read the names of products, the tingling in her right hand.

She decided to leave without buying anything, to get home to bed before the numbing headache began. Carmen was with the doctor; she had two hours before she had to show up for her part in the day's therapy. She would go home, crawl into darkness and seek out the cool silence of sleep.

"Mrs. Carter." She heard the voice for the first time, but was aware that it had spoken her name once or twice before she heard. She turned and faced a young woman, a stranger with burned-looking eyes and lank, light brown hair. She looked slightly like a babysitter Amalie had once hired, but she did not know this woman.

"You're Mrs. Carter."

"Yes."

"I knew it. I'd seen pictures of you, and I followed you here."

"What do you want?"

"I just want to talk to you—I just want to tell you something you should know."

Amalie had the momentary conviction that this woman did not exist; that this irrationally behaving stranger was only another symptom of her oncoming migraine.

"I have to go," Amalie said vaguely, walking backwards slowly.

"Wait. I'm having an affair with your husband." She looked triumphant. Amalie stopped.

"And I want to tell you that he loves me, and he'd divorce you in a hot second if he wasn't worried about hurting your—his—little girl. But I know I'd be a hundred times better mother to her—she'd be happy with me 'cause I'd love her—and when he realizes that. . . . well, I just want to tell you that you've lost your husband and you aren't ever going to get him back, so why don't you just make things easy on all of us and give him a divorce?"

Amalie laughed.

The other woman looked at her, confused, then recovered. "Oh, it's true. Don't you think you can laugh it off. I could tell you things about him so's you'd have to know it's true. We had breakfast this morning at my apartment and then we made love before he went to work. And how about last Wednesday night? When he called and said he was at a poker game in Galveston and since it was so late and he didn't have much gas he was going to spend the night at his buddy's house. Well, let me tell you:

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he was with me, he wasn't in Galveston at no poker game, he was in Houston sleeping with me at my apartment." Her words tumbled and stumbled over each other and out of her mouth, the pitch of her voice going up, her accent becoming more country, more East Texas. Amalie found the noise as annoying as the insistant golds and yellows and oranges stacked around her, glaring in the evil green light of the supermarket. She had to get out.

She didn't want to laugh any more. She felt too sick for laughter. But the claims of this woman deserved nothing better than ridicule. She didn't doubt that Jim was having an affair with her, but it was unimportant, the woman was no threat—there was nothing to threaten. The fact that she had sought Amalie out must mean that she saw in Amalie, the wife, some danger, but that also was untrue. Amalie could have told her that Jim had been lost, irretrievably lost, years before to the moon. The moon was his only mistress, his compelling disease.

Amalie walked away from her shopping cart and the woman who loved her husband, and drove home, squinting to see through the pain of her headache and the tiny, glowing moon which hung in the far right corner of her vision.

The birds who live on the moon make no sound—they have no vocal chords—nor do they communicate with each other in any way. Each lives alone, and although groups may cluster together, may roost all together on one wall, each bird knows itself to be forever alone.

Carmen in company with other people was like a young animal placed among the wrong litter, the stranger in the tribe. She kept to herself, she tried to keep herself safe from the importunities of others and remain in communion only with herself, but the effort drained her. Whenever she came home Carmen always went straight to her room and closed the door. Alone in her room, performing the necessary rituals with her toys, Carmen would calm herself.

Jim called to say that he would not be home for dinner, and Amalie wondered if the woman from the supermarket were standing nearby, feeling triumphant. If tonight she would try to bind Amalie's husband to herself with her flesh and later that night stare hopelessly at his open, dreaming eyes.

Amalie took lamb chops out of the freezer and set them out to defrost. The house was silent. Carmen, who never made any noise, was in her room. But once she had reflected gratefully upon the silence of the house, Amalie realized it was not nearly silent enough. Small noises erupted unpredictably, intruding upon the stillness, and there were sounds that went on and on, like the steady buzz of the clock on the wall and the hum of the refrigerator. Outside birds were chirping, all out of harmony with one another, and she could hear the soft wind-rushing sound of cars on the freeway.

The living room was better. When she shut out the outside world (Go, plane, I don't hear you; cars, birds, bugs do not exist) there was nothing to hear, nothing to bother her. Amalie leaned back in a chair and closed her eyes. Now there was nothing but darkness and silence, the way it must be on the moon. Only the sounds of her own body. She had tried to sleep, earlier, but had been unable, and so the migraine, when it passed, left behind a residue, an unpleasant pressure behind her eyes and a rawness to her nerves.

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She wondered if Jim had been considering divorce. She wasn't certain if the idea was strange or not. They had not been happy together for a long time, but they had never spoken of separating. They simply went on, not as if they were content, but simply as if there were no other road.

Amalie opened her eyes and realized she had been dozing. The house was unnaturally still. Outside the evening was greying quickly towards night.

"Carmen?"

The air seemed to wrap itself around the name and absorb the sound. Amalie, ill at ease, stood up. She felt as if the rest of the world had vanished and she had been left here alone.

"Carmen?" Amalie stood outside Carmen's door, hand hesitating in the air before the knob. She let her hand fall against the door, knuckles grazing the wood in a light knock. "Sweetheart? You want to come set the table for dinner?"

No reply. Wondering if Carmen have gone outside, Amaile opened the door.

Carmen was sitting on the floor, within her usual circle of dolls and toys, each in its assigned place. But around the toys, in a greater circle, stood six strange, large birds. They had large round heads with faces—human faces, not the beaky visages of birds—and ponderous black and white feathered bodies. Standing, they were taller than Carmen sitting in their midst.

Amalie was frozen in the doorway by the sight. The birds did not look at her; Carmen did not move. Amalie broke the tableau with a stumbling run into the room.

"Get! Get!" She shouted harshly, breathlessly, as if she were shooing away ducks or nosy dogs that were bothering her child. She waved her arms at them, but they did not move, and finally one outswinging arm touched a bird, and she recoiled from the touch. The bird was cold, unnaturally, deadly cold. The bird turned its head and looked at her. Then all of the birds began to move; they fell into file and waddled past her—she drew away—through the door and down the hall. When the last of the birds had left the room Carmen looked up at her mother.

"Is it dinner?" she asked.

Amalie stared at her.

"Is it dinner?"

"Carmen—what —?"

"Is it dinner?" Carmen held out her hand and looked at the Mickey Mouse watch on her wrist. She held one finger to it, taking the pulse of it. "Seven o'clock. Is it dinner?"

Amalie nodded, helpless, and Carmen nodded in turn, then carefully, in order, lifted her toys out of the circle and carried them to the shelves where they belonged.

They were in the living room. Amalie avoided looking in the room as she passed it, but she knew they were there. As she broiled the lamb chops and emptied a can of corn into a pot she was as aware of the birds in the living room—dreaming their waking dreams, asleep yet fully conscious—as she was of Carmen, precisely placing three settings at the table a few feet away.

When she went to bed that night the birds were still in the living room, still waiting for whatever they were waiting for. Amalie lay in bed and could not sleep. After awhile she heard Jim's car in the driveway, heard him come in and fix himself a drink. Then there was silence for a long time. He didn't say anything, or put on the light, when he came into the bedoom, and she pretended to be

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asleep. Through her lashes she watched Jim stand by the window and stare out for a long time at the full moon and the quiet street. Then he pulled the curtains to (but they fell apart: a shaft of moonlight spilled across the floor), undressed and climbed in the far side of the bed. Amalie lay still, listening to his breathing become deeper and more even.

She was lying on her side, facing away from Jim, facing the door. Her eyes were open, and so she saw the birds come in. The door was slightly ajar, so the lead bird simply pushed it open, and then they all filed in.

Amalie began to tremble. The birds walked (silently: there was no sound, as there should have been, of their talons pulling at the carpet) around the bed, to Jim's side, and she knew that there they would arragne themselves in a semi-circle and stand and stare at her husband.

She moved closer to him, trying not to whimper. Her trembling shook him, and she burrowed against his back, wishing away the birds. Jim moved and mumbled. He reached over without turning, patted her, and said, "Sleep, sleep," in an absent way.

She wanted to wake him and make him look at the birds, but she was afraid that if she did he wouldn't see them. And they would still be there.

She must have fallen asleep, for she became aware that the room was darker, the moon no longer shining through the window, but now on the other side of the house.

She sat up and looked across Jim to the other side of the room. The birds had gone: there were no dark shapes crouching there, or at least no dark shapes she could not identify as furniture.

For a moment she felt relief. Then she was more alert than before. Carmen.

Carmen was not in her room. The bed was empty. Again, the window was open. This time Amalie ran to the window and climbed out, scraping a bare leg on the brick of the house.

"Carmen!"

The six birds, grouped closely together, were waiting for Carmen to finish her dance to the moon. They would carry her, said their position, away to the moon where she would be alone and free, where she could pile loose rocks in orderly fashion and no one would bother her, no one would interrupt her rituals. They would be an undemanding family, let her perch among the rocks with them, ask her no questions.

"No!" cried Amalie in anguish. "Don't take her, please."

Carmen danced on, heedless. One bird turned its head and looked at Amalie, and she looked into its dead, chill face, its sphinx's face, and knew that she had misunderstood. They had not come for Carmen, but for her.

Jim had been to the moon and never come back; Carmen had no need to be taken there. Only Amalie longed for the moon and could not attain it.

The birds came to her, and as they drew in closer she felt the cold their bodies gave off the way earth animals gave off heat. They stood close together, in a line before her, and Amalie was reminded of how, in the fairy tale, Snow White sleeps across seven dwarf beds pushed together to take her giant body. Amalie lay down on them and wrapped her arms about one neck.

The birds began to run, and their bodies bumped beneath hers like a line of camels. Just as they left the ground (shifting beneath her like a

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waterbed) Amalie began to fear that they could not remain together, that they would separate and drop her. She clung tightly.

The birds flew on towards the moon, lifting and lowering their wings dangerously slowly. The birds who live on the moon do not, when they fly, have much gravity to contend with. They fly slowly and glide through breezeless space. The birds who live on the moon are singular and solitary; they depend on no others but themselves; they do not customarily travel in groups, and their rare sense of purpose is never retained long in the minds of more than one at a time.

Flying against the ponderous weight of the earth, with Amalie further weighing them down, the birds lost interest in her and began to separate, beating their wings more strongly now, aiming themselves at the moon, anxious now only to escape the earth's pull.

Amalie clung with all her might, and felt herself falling, as she had fallen so many times in dreams. Her arms ached, as much from the cold of the bird as from the strain of holding on. She was falling, and pulling the bird down with her. It swiveled its head and bit her on the arm with its large, square, hard teeth. She cried out in shock and pain, her grasp loosening, and the bird flew out from under her and away up towards the moon again, and she fell.

She came to earth on a lonely road, jarred and shattered, face down, broken against the concrete. The moonlight picked out the whiteness of her skin and nightdress and made them glitter as if she were already no more than bones picked clean.

—LISA TUTTLE

The Pursuit of Umbrella **(cont. from page 51)**

two cast curious glances at the impractically-large, gaudily-dyed umbrella the smaller man totes.

PHILLIMORE looked about for the Fairy Queen. Spying a large woman with wings, a Disney-esque wand and a diadem that twinkled in her hair, he brought Boris meekly along to meet her.

"Welcome," she said before Phillimore could speak. "I see that you wish to find a home for this poor, injured gentleman, a place where he will be loved and not scorned, for this is what you promised him if he performed services on your behalf. I perceive that you regard our world, a world you seem to equate with one of our sisters, Iolanthe, as a gilbertandsullivan place, what *that* is. But you maintain that in a gilbertandsullivan world, the comely and fair are frequently villainous, while the homely are generally decent folk whose eventual rewards are great. Am I not correct?"

"Why, yes. . ." Phillimore stammered, "but—"

"Your friend is certainly welcome to stay with us," the Fairy Queen interrupted, "for we find him most attractive in a rather baroque manner—" (Here Boris shyly blushed) "and I also note that having kept your word to him, you intend to travel to other worlds. Am I not correct?"

"Yes! Absolutely!" Phillimore said in mighty wonder. "But how do you know all that about me?"

The Fairy Queen's eyes sparkled as bright as her diamond tiara. "Bit of a fey quality, I fancy" she remarked.

—MARVIN KAYE

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Jack Dann returns with a short story about Mrs. Fishbine and her–

DAYS OF STONE

JACK DANN

IT WAS DUSK and Mrs. Fishbine was still lolling about in bed, changing channels with her teevee selector, thumbing through fashion magazines, and occasionally staring at the window across the room. Evening threatened to be long and deadly cold; but she would turn up the heat, smoke her menthol cigarettes, and watch the frost-fingers etch midnight scenes on the glass. She would wait for the phone to ring. She would wait for her sons to surprise her with a visit.

I won't eat, she thought, until they call me.

She went back to her magazines.

Mrs. Fishbine could lie in bed, almost without moving, for hours. She would stare at the whorls in the ceiling and dream of a young man who would quietly give her all her dreams in return for a kiss and a smile. But gradually her memories would poison her daydreams and turn them into stark, cold things. She would remember that she was sixty-two and her hair was thinning. Make-up caked on her face now—she had to use too much of it to cover the wrinkles. Then, after she felt old and ugly and fragile, she would remember that Damon had left her, after thirty years. After she had given up everything for him.

She now was old and dead—she repeated the words to herself: *deadead and old*. But he was a man, and a man could do anything. A man could find a younger woman to take care of him. There were always plenty hanging around. *Younger woman*, she said to herself. Damon's new plaything was forty; she'll wrinkle soon. *Let her face fall off.*

Usually when she thought of Damon, she would awaken from her trance. This time, however, she would not open her eyes. She would die, even as she breathed. Her thought roiled like cigarette smoke in the infinities of red behind her closed eyelids. She devised ordinary, but bloody, deaths for Damon and Lorna. She ran through the usual stock list of car accidents and muggings and settled for a prosaic rape—Damon would be tied up and forced to watch young men with slick hair torture and kill Lorna.

Dreams uncoiled as she sank into lower thermoclines of sleep.

I love you I'm sorry I love you I'm sorry, he whispered to her in a dream bright as kleig-lights. But he still had his face. He was still young. He would have his mistress, and they would both stay young until Mrs. Fishbine's skin cracked away. For an instant, a delicious second, she could see herself: She was beautiful and dressed in a stiff skirt and lacy blouse. Her hair was black and piled high on her head; ringlets hung loose over her ears and her skin was soft and smooth.

But her face became grey and fell off and she woke up. The television was blaring. A talk show. She looked

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out the window. How much time had passed—an hour? fifteen minutes?

She waited and read. She had that feeling—it was just about time for a visit. David and Carl, her sons, had been spending too much time with their father. Granted, he was sick, but they owed her an hour. *I'm still their mother.*

SHE HEARD FOOTSTEPS downstairs about ten o'clock. She waited while one of her sons, probably David, she thought, fixed himself a snack. *He can at least yell 'hello.'*

Let him come up here. I'm not going down to him.

It was David. She had always thought he was the best of the two boys: Carl didn't give a damn about anyone, except his father.

"Did I wake you, Mom?" he asked as he entered the room. He sat down on his father's bed, opposite hers. David looked like his father—same high forehead, deep-set brown eyes, shock of hair, and rugged lined face. Mrs. Fishbine hated him for that and sometimes forgot that she was talking to her son instead of her husband.

David did not wait for smalltalk and chat, but told her right away that Damon was sick, that he had cancer, that he was going to New York City for an operation. She tried to look bored, tried not to let her facial muscles give her away, but they did: she grimaced. It was a nervous smile, no more. It was a sigh of relief, an affirmation that justice still had a balance. Her hatred and pain stiffened her, gave her strength and wore her down.

She listened to David and watched him change. First his eyes—they were watery and shallow, tiny birdbaths scooped out of his plastic face; and his face was soft and lineless. He looked like anybody else, but not her son. He was a featureless worm, a pale thing that was slowly melting.

"If he dies," David went on, "then you'll have nothing. Do you know that? So you'd better hope that he lives."

But it didn't mean anything. Cancer. Memorial Hospital. Lorna. She lit a cigarette. Of course it was a triumph, but now she didn't care. It was already done. She had only to finish the conversation, hold on to her son so she could watch his metamorphosis. She wasn't afraid. It was as if she had expected the world to dissolve, lose its lines and faces. But her room still had its cloying presence. It was hard and sharp, full of angles and ornaments.

"Well," she said, "that's what he wanted. He caught it from her. She had it, right in her filthy crotch."

David talked on. He was angry, but that was alright: it seemed to quicken his change. His face was a smooth oval. His hands were too long; they seemed to melt like candle wax on his knees.

She let him talk until he started to smell, a putrescent smell like rotten food and garbage on the street, a sweet smell of perfume gone slightly bad from perspiration.

She took a deep breath and he left.

It doesn't matter now, Mrs. Fishbine thought. He's dead. She would work that out, rationalize it; but she would have plenty of time to mourn for him. After all, she thought, he'll still be walking about. But his father was another matter. He would take some time growing ugly and developing enough sores to cancel himself.

"Come on now," she said. "What silly thoughts. Damon won't die. Skin cancer . . . So let David stay with his

(cont. on page 93)

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Paul Halpine makes his professional debut with a story about another time and place, an enchanted king, a scheming regent, and–

THE WIZARD AND DEATH

PAUL HALPINE

Illustrated by DAN STEFFAN

THE HILLS around the lake were, for the most part, blue with spruce. Occasionally great rounded outcroppings of grey rock appeared. At one of these, hidden by the position of two huge vertical rocks, was the tall and narrow entrance to a cave. Inside, it widened into a single vast, circular room nearly seventy feet in diameter. The ceiling was high and domed. What little light there was came through the mouth of the cave. The room was littered with the debris of failed experiments. There were broken crucibles and crockery, stains where oddly colored chemicals had spilled. Books that had been found useless were thrown about and there were places where yellowing, hand-scrawled paper had been stacked for future reference. Most of these stacks had toppled and the slight breeze which entered the cave had distributed them around the room. On a shelf, in the very back of the cave, beneath the most smoke-blackened part of the dome, sat the stone cottage where the wizard and Death lived.

"Death!" the growling voice would boom from the house. There would be a clatter and crash, the thumping and banging of a frantic search. A clay jar would fly through the unglazed window to crash next to a pristine pile of bones—the results of yet another failed experiment. "Death!"

A small creature, no bigger than a large rabbit, would scurry through the rubbish, leaping piles of paper, dodging through the maze. A leap to the bench, from there to the window, and Death was now inside.

"Death!" The wizard had his back turned. He was bent, rummaging through the woodbin. His dark coat gave him the appearance of a huge furry mountain. The mountain grew suddenly and became the back of a large and hideous man. He jerked his head from left to right as though trying to think of a place where it—whatever *it* was—might be. Whirling suddenly, he seemed surprised to see Death standing on the table. "So there you are."

Death had legs like a cat, though with larger feet. His upper torso was similar to a man's but the head was more like that of a reptilian monkey's—large, soulful eyes beneath a scaly brow. A ridge began high on that brow, continued down the backbone, and extended along the tapering, barbed tail. It was prehensile. Death, as the wizard called him, was a demon.

"I've been robbed!" bellowed the wizard, his eyes flaring, his finger

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pointing toward the low ceiling. The finger swung down accusingly. "*You* are supposed to protect me from robbers. One of my diamonds is missing. How am I supposed to grind diamond dust with only *one* diamond?" The wizard thrust his face to within an inch of Death's. "The answer is I *can't*," he hissed. His breath was foul.

Death knew the wizard had not been robbed. Two days earlier, the wizard, unable to find his mortar and pestle, had been using the diamond to grind some minerals in a crucible. The crucible cracked. In a fit of rage, the wizard rushed through the door and across the floor of the cave. Papers fluttered in his wake. He slid to a stop on the shelf just outside the cave and flung the crucible, diamond and all, out and down into the lake. He returned kicking and throwing things about. The beetles which picked through the rubbish stayed hidden for nearly a day.

"*You*—" the wizard slammed his fist to the table, nearly knocking Death from his feet"—*you* must find me another diamond." Then low and intensely he whispered, "Or else."

Frightened, Death nodded quickly, then swung down from the table and scurried out the door. He did not pause until he was well past the entrance of the cave.

The wizard was a terrible master, always shouting, always blaming him for things he had nothing to do with. But Death had to serve him. He had no choice. If he did not do as the wizard said then man would send him back to—. Death shuddered. He preferred not to think of the alternative.

The voice rolled like thunder from the cave. "Get moving!"

Death sprinted over the rocks that led down to the path at the lake's shore. He had no idea of where to get

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a diamond, but the town at the far end of the lake seemed a good place to start looking.

THE TOWN of Farhath had grown randomly on the hills that sloped up from the lake. The streets rose and fell, twisting this way and that. Many came to abrupt ends where something had been built in their middle. There was no consistency of architecture or design. Land had been traded, bought, and sold with total disregard for any plan. Low clay buildings with thatched roofs crowded against structures of brick. It had once been a prosperous place, bright and cheerful and crowded. Then the plague came, and with it, death and pestilence. Now most buildings were drab in disrepair. Many were abandoned. Small, scrawny rats roamed the dark streets. It was dusk when Death entered the town.

People did not take lightly to demons in such times, and Death stayed off to the side of the path, moving in the shadows. He crept around a man that lay dead or drunk against a wall. Something dark and oily trickled between the cobblestones. It had the smell of rotting fish. Where the path forked downhill in the direction of the the docks, Death bore right, following it up toward the center of town. He climbed a loosely mortared wall behind which, somewhere, a baby was crying. The roofs were uneven, with shingles and large, gaping holes. Timbers creaked under even Death's slight weight. He moved nimbly, avoiding the weak spots, leaping and climbing from one level to the next. A few startled rats ran squealing from where something lay dead. And Death heard voices ahead.

He made for the low, rounded roof of the tavern. Lowering himself down the chimney, he dropped the last few feet into the fireplace itself. There he came to rest. The fire did not singe the fur of his legs; the smoke did not choke him. He had been born among these things. Two round eyes, brighter than the flames around them, surveyed the scene beyond.

At a long table which ended near the fire sat two men, hard and grizzled-looking in the flickering light of the hearth. The heavier of the two took a long draught of ale and passed the bucket, sloshing, to his partner. As the younger man guzzled, the first wiped the foam from his beard. "Death," he said, "death and disease. That's all we have left. While the king hides in his castle. The last of my sons died this summer. How am I supposed to catch fish with a crew of one, I ask you?"

The younger man, more inebriated, could only nod in commiseration.

With a huge, weathered paw the big man scooped up the bucket for another swig. He brought it down with a thud. "It's not fair," he said. "While we starve, the king sits in his castle counting his gold and playing with his diamonds and rubies. And will he even show his face?" The man shook his head violently. "He will not. He's been hiding since spring. He's afraid. He knows what the people are thinking. Divine, indeed. I think the regent is right. It's time we had a new king." He held up the bucket for a toast. "The regent for king."

Of all this, Death heard but one word—*diamonds*.

"There's talk of war with Brafan. How can a king who's afraid of his own people protect us when—"

The young man had turned to face the fire. He gave a startled jerk, shook his head, blinked his eyes, and

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looked again. "What's the matter?" asked the other.

"I thought," the young man slurred, "I thought I saw something in the fire."

The older man shrugged. "The faces of the dead."

"No. This was something real, something small and alive."

"Probably a rat fell down the chimney. Serves him right." He said this with conviction.

There was a moment of doubtful silence. Then a nod. "Serves him right," the young man agreed. And he returned to the bucket of ale.

THE STAIRS in the hall of the regent's house swept down in a great semi-circle that ended in a slight curve to the left. They were narrow for the size of the room and had a serpentine look to them. Down these stairs came the regent, tall and thin in a magnificent robe that reached nearly to the ground, concealing his feet. He seemed to glide down the stair and across the hall. He swept through the parlor to a curtained doorway. Pushing aside the colorful hanging, he moved silently into the library.

Shelves of dark wood covered all four walls and rose high overhead, making the room seem more narrow than it was. Everything was covered with books. Old books mingled with new books. Fine hand-tooled bindings sat next to shabby cloth ones. But at the far end of the room, where a man in shabby clothing stood with his back turned, were the most precious volumes of all. These were hand-written sheaves bound simply in plain leather. The information they contained had been extracted under torture.

The poorly dressed man stepped toward the shelves slowly, almost reverently. He extended a hand toward the books. His fingers protruded from well-worn gloves. He touched the volumes lightly.

"Take care," said the regent. The man pulled back his arm with a start. The regent's voice was soft yet powerful. "Those tomes are priceless and cannot be replaced. It was not easy to gather the information they contain."

The regent was a member of court by birth but the rest he had gained on his own. He had labored hard, dealing and blackmailing, working quietly behind the scenes. His power had grown. In time, he was named regent, right-hand to the throne, second only to the king. Some laws were made, witch-hunts begun, and the regent put himself in charge. He sent to the west for clergy who were skilled in the art of torture. As the confessions poured forth the ways of witchcraft, all was written down. It was these writings the regent had studied to become a sorcerer himself.

"You were a fool to come here the way you did, Bolfar," said the regent. "Those at the castle already suspect that I am behind this. I do not wish the people to become suspicious, also."

Bolfar nodded meekly.

"Did you take care of that matter we discussed?"

Bolfar nodded again. "That loyalist fisherman will cause you no more trouble. There was a—an accident. He fell overboard from his boat."

The regent smiled. His face was dark and hawk-like. "Very well. You can go back to making the rounds of the taverns. Continue to spread dissent. I have ordered the army to the Brafan frontier, claiming danger of invasion. As soon as the people are sufficiently aroused, we will strike."

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Bolfar was gazing about the room. "I envy people like you," he said, "people who can read."

The regent laughed. "And I envy people like you. Your ambitions are so easily fulfilled. A little more money, a few more comforts and you are happy. But for me—for anyone in the second most powerful position—there is but one burning ambition. And that is not so easily quenched."

The regent's eyes were vacant. Bolfar had seen the nobleman fall into these reveries before. They embarrassed the peasant. He tugged at the edge of his tattered cloak. The regent looked up. "You will have good clothes soon enough. But for now, it is best you blend in with the townfolk."

The regent kicked back a rug that lay on the fine wood floor. Beneath it was a trapdoor. "Go this way," he said. "I want no one to see you leaving this house. It leads to the cottage on the inlet below here. You can spend the day there." He took a taper from the candelabrum on the desk and handed it to Bolfar. The man descended to the tunnel below.

The regent remembered the house on the inlet well. He had spent much of his adolescence there, alone, devising the plan he was now about to complete. The regent soon would be king.

A sudden cry came from below. The regent grabbed a candle and raced down the stairs through the tunnel. He stopped where Bolfar's candle had been dropped and gone out. Beside it, Bolfar was on hands and knees, vomiting. In front of him was the body of a woman.

She had been a tinker's daughter, driven to whoring by the death of her family. But for the regent, she had been a test-case—and failed one. For months she had lain in the narrow corridor, the flesh rotting from her bones. Yet all this time, she still lived. Barely. But she lived. Now, even that last tiny ember of life had gone out. All that remained were dripping bones rising from an oozing putrescence.

THE DRAWBRIDGE was down. But there, just across the bridge, on the other side of the portcullis, stood two guards. The moon was occluded and a chill wind swept up Death's back as he peered into the darkness of the moat. The sides were smooth and vertical. Far below, there was movement like inky water flowing. But was it water? Death cocked a peaked ear and listened. The sound was that of silk sliding on silk. A rustle? No—more like a slither. It was then that Death realized what he saw. Repulsion and fear swelled within him and he backed away from the edge. The bottom of the moat was covered with thousands upon thousands of ratsnakes.

They had been brought north as a defensive against the pestilence of two years before. Following in the wake of the plague, millions of rats had swept down on the town. They thrived on the death and disease, multiplying in numbers. As the population of the town declined, the plague died out. The rats were soon starving. In their voraciousness, they turned on one another. Only a small part of the original multitudes remained. The ratsnakes were undoubtedly hungry. Death decided on another means of entry to the castle.

No one saw the small, dark shape ascend the drawbridge chain. There was nobody near the windlass as Death slipped to the floor. He moved

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quickly to the door. The hall was bare except for a few stark pieces of furniture and an occasional tapestry. There were no people and few lamps lighted his way. Pausing at the exit to the central courtyard, Death peered about. Most of the king's guard had been sent to the Brafan border. Of the few that remained, the majority were asleep at their posts. The tiny demon would have no problem if he moved close to the walls and in shadows. He descended the stone stair and headed for the largest building of the complex. His reasoning was this: The treasure would be near the throneroom. And throneroom were always quite large. This one was no exception.

Just inside the great hall, a single torch sputtered. The rest was in darkness. Death moved quickly from pillar to pillar through the gloom. There was only the soft scratch of his claws on the stone floor. As his sharp eyes grew accustomed to the low and irregular light, Death was able to discern the form of a carpet that led up the few steps to a silhouette that could only be the throne. Perhaps it would be ornamented with diamonds. No more than two feet from the towering chair Death stopped suddenly and cringed. The king stared down at him from the throne.

The knuckles stood out sharply where his hands gripped the dark wood. His unblinking eyes were dry and frosted, his skin pale and drawn. His expression was one that Death had seen before. Here was a man who had died of terror. Then something glinted, catching the demon's eye. Around the king's neck hung a pendant—a *diamond* pendant. Death had just started toward the still figure when there was a noise from the far end of the hall.

"He is not dead," said a woman's voice. She and a man carrying a torch were coming down the aisle toward the throne. Death ducked into the shadow beneath the chair. The woman's clothes and bearing indicated noble birth. The man was a soldier. He wore the uniform of the king's guard. "The regent is behind this isn't he?" he asked.

"I believe so," she replied. "It is a clever plan. If my father were dead, I would ascend to the throne. But with the king incapacitated, the regent holds full power."

"But what has he done with the power?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

They came up the steps and stooped before the throne. Death slipped farther back beneath it, until he could see only their feet. The princess wore red velvet slippers with designs of silver thread. The man's boots were spattered with mud and showed the stirrup-marks of hard riding.

"The regent continues only to collect taxes," said the woman. "He does nothing to help the people. My father had plans to assist the people until they got back on their feet. None of these have been implemented. The people blame my father."

"You haven't told them of the king's condition?"

"How could we? They were already on the verge of rebellion. The plague, the vermin, last year's hard winter. They blame my father for all of these. The regent's spies have done their work well. What would happen if the people knew the king was—" her voice dropped low"—like this?"

Two tiny hands appeared at the top of the throne. Between them, a head rose only high enough for the eyes to

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see. The princess was crying, but still held her chin high, as though in defiance of her own emotions. Death blinked his wide eyes. A tear dropped to his hand. The captain laid a hand gently on the princess's shoulder. The manner in which he looked at her was not that of a soldier looking at a future queen, but in the manner of a lover. "I could kill the regent," he said. "No one need ever know you were involved. I could confess to the crime, say I acted alone."

"And hang? You would do anything for your kingdom."

"I would do anything for you."

She smiled sadly and shook her head. Her hair glistened. "No. You cannot fight his kind by becoming one of them. It would only lead to anarchy. Assassination leads to assassination. Who would be the next of royalty to die? Myself perhaps?"

"But what is to keep the regent from telling about the king?"

"I am. By virture of my existence. He will wait until he is certain that people will put him, and not me, on the throne. But that time cannot be far off. That is why I sent for you to return from the frontier. As princess, I can still choose my own bodyguard. I need your help. My father's trance can only be the result of witchcraft. We must fight magic *with* magic. We must find someone who can break the spell."

"But how?" the young man asked. "The regent's purge was most effective. What few sorcerers, wizards and witches remain would be very well hidden."

"None the less, we must find one." She turned and descended the steps. The captain paused only long enough for a quick glance at the king before following. Death breathed a sigh of relief. The wizard would already be angry that he had been gone so long. He was anxious to collect his prize and leave. He dropped deftly to the king's shoulder. The catch of the pendant was stiff. It gave way suddenly and unexpectedly. The necklace dropped to the king's lap. The heavy chain rattled. The young man stopped and turned. "Did you hear something?" Death crouched down close to the cold, stiff shoulder. The young man was striding toward the throne, holding the torch high in the air. He would soon be close enough to see the pendant. Death went up and over the king's shoulder. He grabbed the necklace and dropped to the floor.

"Stop!" the captain shouted. "Guards! Guards!"

Death ran through a side door and into a hallway. The sound of running boots was coming from one direction. Death took the other. The captain was close behind. Down the hall and up the stairs they went. A soldier appeared from nowhere. Still clutching the necklace, Death feinted left and dodged to the right. The soldier grabbed and missed as Death went running by. The guards were shouting. Their feet were pounding. They were gaining on him quickly. Death's furry legs were a blur as he ran sliding around a corner. A nobleman, roused by the noise, stepped into the hall. He froze at the sight of the onrushing men. Death ran between his legs. There was a crash and some cursing before the footfalls resumed. Death slid to a stop, braking with his tail. The hall was dead-ended. There was nothing ahead but a wall. He turned and looked about. A door was open to the left and Death ran into the room.

It was sparsely furnished, a chair, a bed, and a fireplace. The only other exit was an open window. Death

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bounded from floor to chair to sill. There he stopped abruptly. Forty feet below was the moat. And Death remembered the ratsnakes. Guards, led by the captain, were pouring into the room. "Shut the door," he shouted. A hand swung out. Death dodged and jumped to the floor. Two guards dived after him as he darted under the bed. He stopped. There was still one route of escape. Death broke from cover, headed for the fireplace. He could climb the chimney to the roof. A guard blocked his way and panic seized him. He turned away from the hearth. Darkness settled over him. Something swept him from his feet. The demon had been caught.

The captain rose, holding the struggling bundle in his cape. A guard drew back his sword and prepared to run it through. "Wait," said the captain. He smiled. "There's a better use for him."

THE REGENT paced back and forth before the fireplace. He whirled about suddenly. "You're certain about its appearance?"

The man in the chair wore an expensive-looking cloak. Rubies flashed on his fingers. "Quite certain," he said. "It ran right between my legs. Then when we were all sprawled on the floor, I saw it again. It stopped briefly at the end of the hall."

The regent drew a brow together, wrinkling his high forehead. "And you're sure they took it alive?"

"I'm positive." He waved an arm in the air. "I heard a muffled chattering from the officer's cape as he walked by my door. I tried to follow, to see what they did with it, but the guards wouldn't let me pass. I waited until the halls were clear, then dressed and came right here. I don't know what that creature is, but I thought it was something you would want to know about."

"It is," said the regent thoughtfully. "It is indeed." Then, as an afterthought, "I want to thank you."

The count rose and shook hands. "You won't forget about this?" he asked. "I mean if, say, any good fortune might befall you. . . ."

The regent looked surprised. "Haven't I always taken care of you?" The man smiled as the regent walked him to the door. The wind that blew in was chill and the regent was glad to return to the fireplace in his parlor. As he entered, two men came through a curtain from the library. One was Darum, the regent's bodyguard, a large and dim-witted man. The other was Bolfar. Bolfar did not like the expression on the regent's face. "What is this creature the count was talking about?" he asked.

"A demon," said the regent, staring into the fire. "I am certain about that."

"Then there is a wizard about somewhere."

The regent nodded gravely.

"What if the demon tells them the whereabouts of this wizard?"

"He can't." The regent walked to a large, padded chair. "They would have to be wizards themselves to understand the speech of demons."

Bolfar breathed a sigh of relief. "Then we're safe."

"Not entirely," said the regent as he slipped into the chair. He placed his finger tips together, forming a tent with his hands. "We must be ready for whatever they do. I had best study my books." He leaned back. "But for now, the next move is theirs."

DEATH sat in a cage, listening. A

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dark cloth was draped over the cage, but his acute hearing indicated no one was about. He tried the bars. They were strong but widely spaced for a creature of his size. The upper part of his body could easily clear the bars, but his hips were too wide to go through one way and the joint of his tail prevented passage another. He sat back and thought. By putting his tail through first, then one leg, then turning as he brought through the other, he squeezed between the bars. After a quick peek, he emerged from under the cloth. The demon might have wondered at the ease of his escape. But he wasted little time on such thoughts; good fortune was too hard to find.

The light in the room was dim, its only source the first morning glow entering a samll window. He made his was to the door and peered cautiously into the hall. It was one through which he had passed the previous night. It was almost too good to be true. No one was about. Death moved quickly around the corner and down the stairs. He was headed for the throneroom. Escape would mean nothing if he did not have the diamond for the wizard.

He stopped only once, ducking into an alcove as two guards passed, talking. His luck was still with him. By the light of the skylight, he could see the throne was as it had been the night before. The precious stone hung shining on the king's breast. Death climbed the back of the throne. The catch on the chain opened easily and the gem was his. He moved quickly up the aisle, pausing only to pull down a banner. He dragged it to the door. There he climbed the wall and loosened the torch from its socket, dropping it onto the cloth. The banner was beginnning to smolder as Death slipped into the courtyard.

Staying low and close to the wall, he made his way around to the main gate. He crouched behind some barrels and waited. It was only a few moments before the first cries were heard from the throneroom. "Fire! Fire!" The guards at the gate became instantly alert. They turned toward the source of the sound. Death went behind them and through the bars of the portcullis. A quick sprint over the drawbrigde and he was free.

The people of the town were just rising from their sleep. The only ones about were fishermen at the docks preparing their boats for another day's work. They did not notice the tiny, racing figure with its precious burden. And they paid little attention to the men who followed it.

DEATH hurried across the cave and up through the window. The wizard was using a large bone in a fruitless attempt to grind something. "It's about time," he bellowed. "Did you get the diamond?" Death held out the pendant. The wizard snatched it from his hand. He grunted. "It's a bit small, but I suppose it will do." He bent back the metal to free the stone. It dropped to the floor and shattered. His bushy brow drew down. "A fake," he cried. "You tried to trick me. I'll have your head for this."

Death jumped to the side as the bone crashed down where he had been standing. The wizard swung but Death was already through the window. The wizard slammed open the door and went roaring in pursuit. Through the rubbish they went, Death dodging left and right, the wizard cursing and swinging. Running under, over and around the junk, Death managed to stay just ahead. The wizard plowed straight through,

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oblivious to any obstacles. Crockery shattered, stacks toppled. Death dived under a broken table. The club came down. The table shattered. Splinters were still airborne as Death jumped up and away.

"Where are you?" said the wizard as he poked through the shards of the table. He straightened and looked about. "Where are you?"

Death slumped against a pile of papers, breathing hard. The jog from the castle to the cave had tired him. He was in no condition for a chase like this. It was several minutes before he noticed an unnatural silence. He leaned out to see what was happening. Two green eyes looked back at him.

"There you are!"

Death headed for the exit as bone-driven papers went flying.

The sudden emergence into sunlight blinded him. He ran head-on into something. Sprawled on his back he blinked up to see a soldier with drawn sword. He should have known the escape had been too easy. It was then that the wizard burst into view. He stopped short and looked around.

The half-dozen soldiers cowered back slightly. They had not been ready for this. The man that stood before them was at least seven feet tall and massive. His fists were the size of a normal man's head. He wore a shabby bearskin coat which matched the matted black hair of his head and beard.

The wizard eyed them with a surprised and questioning look. "Who are you?" he demanded.

At the sound of his great bass voice a shudder ran through the bank of soldiers. One man, a lieutenant, stepped forward hesitantly. "We are soldiers of the king. And you are—" his voice cracked. He swallowed and tried again. "—you are under arrest for the practice of witchcraft." The man turned his head slightly as though thinking to flee.

The wizard's powerful gaze moved from one to the other to the other. His face was expressionless. Slowly, the skin purpled from his neck to his brow. As though somewhere inside his skull flame had touched dry parchment, his eyes suddenly flared. With a hideous yell he went forward, swinging the club-like bone.

The soldiers shrank back, knocking against one another. One fell screaming down and into the lake. Others broke to the sides. The lieutenant held his ground. "Take him alive," someone shouted. But the soldiers fought for their lives. The lieutenant swung with his sword. Metal clanged against bone. The bludgeon cracked but did not break. The officer lost his balance. The bone came back, breaking arm and ribs. The lieutenant fell to the side.

One man, smaller and thinner than the rest, had retreated a short distance down the rocks. He drew an arrow from his quiver as the wizard waded into the men that blocked his way to the cave. A scar-faced swordsman feinted and lunged. The wizard knocked the strike to the side. His kick to the groin lifted the man from his feet. Death spotted the archer and jumped to grab to bow. The arrow went wild, catching only the bearskin coat. The bowman slapped the demon away and reached for another shaft. The wizard saw the dangling arrow. He headed for the archer. The man had just notched another round as the bone cracked over his helm.

"Wizard!" The cry came from behind the above. The wizard turned as a boulder came down. It struck him square on the crown as he ducked.

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He dropped to his knees and from there to all fours. He shook his head. He drew one leg under him and rose again to his feet. He stood swaying for a moment, then fell forward with a thud.

The soldiers pulled themselves together, moaning and nursing their wounds. From above, the captain shouted, "Bind him and send for a boat. He's far too large to carry."

Still dazed by the slap he'd received, Death struggled to his feet. A hand grabbed him by the tail, lifting him into the air. A grinning, upside-down face said, "You'll be coming too."

A FISHING BOAT stopped at the foot of a high cliff to the south of the town. They had sailed wide around the lake, from the other boats. It would have taken an exceptionally keen eye to have seen that the crew were not fisherman but soldiers. A horn sounded one low note. A boulder seemed to roll aside. Beyond it was a cavern, and within the cavern a dock.

More soldiers joined the crew and together they unloaded two passengers. One was bound in chains and ropes, the other imprisoned in a sack. It took six men to carry the larger prisoner back through the twisting, narrowing cave. They stopped where an iron door was set in the wall. The man in the rear, the one carrying the sack, came forward and knocked a particular beat. There was a clanking from within and the door creaked open.

The tunnel sloped up steeply. Several times the six men, grunting, shifted their burden before moving on again. Water dripped from between the stained bricks. The oily odor of burning lamps mixed with a misty smell. Two more iron doors were passed before the men emerged into the stone-walled room.

Death fell from the sack with a plop. Above him, a small door clanked shut and a lock clinked into place. He was caged once again. Blinking, he swiveled his small reptilian head to survey the scene around. The light was not much better than it had been in the sack. On the far side of the room, a torch burned, lighting part of the wall. Overhead, a low ceiling was darkened with soot. They were in the castle dungeon.

The men carrying the wizard appeared. They were red-faced and sweating despite the chill, damp air. There was a general groan of relief as they set the prisoner down. Order were given and they fastened the wizard's chains to rings that were set in the wall. Spread by bindings at wrists and ankles, he resembled a bearskin tacked up to dry.

As more torches were lit, Death took advantage of the extra illumination to examine his own small prison. As much as the first cage had been built to allow escape, this one was designed to prevent it. The bars were thick and closely set. There were cross-bars every few inches. Death was climbing these to where he might be able to examine the lock when he heard footsteps approaching.

They were descending an unseen but nearby flight of stairs. The tread of heavy boots accompanied the quiet of slippers. Echoing, a woman's voice said, "How do we know this is not the wizard responsible for the king's trance?"

"A man involved in the overthrow of a kingdom would not jeopardize his plan by attempting simple thievery. I am certain this is another wizard."

The footsteps found level ground

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and came still closer. The princess and the captain appeared from around a corner. The woman gasped at the sight of the wizard. "I thought wizards were all skinny old men." Several of the guards exchanged rueful glances. "Wake him," she said.

A wooden pail was brought forward and its contents splashed against the prisoner's hanging head. With the sudden chill of the water, a spasm jerked his body. He shook his head, sputtering and blowing water from his dripping beard. Between damp strands of matted hair, rage returned to the eyes. His voice was a low rumble that cut through the silence. "You will be sorry you have done this. I will bring forth such sorceries and horrors as have never been seen before. You will pray for death as surcease."

The captain stepped forward, reaching for his sword. But the princess touched his wrist lightly and shook her head. She looked up at the wizard. "You don't frighten me," she said. You see, unlike yourself, I had no choice of my lot in life. I was born for one purpose and one purpose alone, to rule this kingdom. If the regent succeeds in overthrowing my father, this kingdom will die. Its death is my death, a far worse one than you could contrive."

"King or regent," said the wizard, "it makes no difference to me. One is as bad as the other. A man should rule himself."

The princess turned her back on him and strolled leisurely across the room. "Your days of self-rule may be over," she said, turning to walk toward Death. "The charge against you is witchcraft. The usual punishment is burnig at the stake. But law prescribes only death and does not state the means." She stopped and gestured toward the far end of the room. "The torture devices you see have rusted with disuse. But they can be put in shape. Your last few weeks of life could be an eternity of hell."

The wizard threw back his head and laughed. "You think I care for your methods of pain? I can feel nothing if I choose. I could kill myself with a thought."

"You care for life," snapped the captain. "Else you would not have fought so hard at the cave."

The princess watched this exchange like a parent tolerating a sibling squabble. She turned and resumed her walk. At the demon's cage, she stopped and peered in.

Death leaned forward, poking his head between the bars. The best strategy, it seemed to him, was to make friends with the enemy. He made a semblance of a smile and blinked large, sad eyes at her. She stroked his head with a forefinger. He sighed and half-closed his eyes. "Such a cute little fellow," she said. Then, to the wizard, "What is his name?"

"Death, " the wizard replied.

The princess seemed a little shocked. "Such a terrible name for such a fine little creature." She tickled him lightly under the chin with her fingernail. Her smile broadened and his eyes closed completely. "What," she asked, "is his life worth to you?"

Death's eyes popped open. He jerked his head back into the cage. He swallowed once, with difficulty.

"Nothing," said the wizard. "He means nothing to me."

"My father sits in the throneroom above here," said the princess, returning to the captain's side. "He is under a spell, neither alive nor dead, but somewhere in between. You must break that spell."

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"I will not."

"Then the demon will die." She drew the captain's sword and strode back toward the cage. Death backpedaled until his spine struck the bars.

"No," cried the wizard. He strained against his bonds. "I need him. He's my assistant. He helps with my experiments. I would need him to free your father."

"But you won't free my father, so his life means nothing to me." She thrust the blade between the bars. Death cowered into the corner. The wizard's face contorted as he pulled against the chains. Metal squeeked, mortar crumbled. And with a snap, the wizard was free.

Ths captain stepped back and guards drew their swords. The wizard took the chains in his hands. "I'll kill him," cried the princess. She pushed the blade forward. Its tip pricked the flesh of Death's chest. The bars were hard against his back. He let out a tiny wail.

"Wait!" cried the wizard. His eyes darted from the guards to the princess and back.

"Then you will help us?" As the princess spoke, the sword point juggled. A drop of grey-green blood appeared.

"I will help you if you meet my terms."

"*We* shall dictate the terms."

"And what good will your dictates be when the regent takes the throne?"

"It would be too late for you by then."

"And too late for your father."

For the first time, the princess seemed unsure of herself. "What are your terms?" she asked.

The grimness lifted from the wizard's face. "That I am frée to return to my cave, to preform my experiments unhindered." A grin spread across his face. "And I will require a diamond for my troubles." Death moaned.

"You ask a lot, " said the princess.

"And you ask for a king."

The princess hesitated. "Very well," she said and withdrew the sword from the cage. Death slumped to the floor. His nerves wers shattered.

Put away your weapons," said the captain to his men. "It seems we have formed an alliance."

The princess bent forward and looked into the cage. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "It was the only way."

Death examined his wound.

DARUM stopped as soon as he had entered the library. The regent sat in the stiff, high-backed chair. His eyes were closed and he sat unnaturally rigid. Darum started forward only to stop suddenly with fright. On the floor before him was a five-foot snake. Its head was raised by a third of its body-length. Its eyes were fixed on him. It looked him up and down. Darum could not help the feeling that it was studying him with human intelligence.

Then, slowly, it lowered itself to the floor and slithered away. It went up and over the edge of a crate, and disappeared inside. A hand lashed out, slapping the lid into place. The regent was awake.

"News?" he asked, speaking loudly for the bodyguard's benefit.

Darum shook his head. "Nothing. The soldiers have not returned."

"That's good. It means they have as yet been unable to find the wizard. In a head to head confrontation I would be no match for a man capable of conjuring demons. Magic is as much practice as it is knowledge; my power

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would be no match for his. But even if they find him, I'm ready. I have found another way to dispose of this necromancer."

"You sound more confident than you did."

"You are an astute observer, Darum." The regent smiled. "Today, while I napped, I had a dream. Upon waking, the memory of it was vague, but I remember this much: I had been in battle with their wizard. And I had crushed his heart."

THE WIZARD lay in a small, windowless room just off the throneroom. It had been intended by the designer as a storeroom for the banners and chandeliers and gold shields that decorated the great hall in tiems of pageantry. But his king had little use for such frills and the room was bare except for a chest and, on each side of the chest, a tall candle stand. An odd, musty odor rose from the two dimly burning candles. Between them lay the wizard, his skin contrasting with his beard like snow on charred ground. His huge hands were folded lightly on his chest. An intruder into the room would have been startled, not only by the deathlike appearance of the man, but by the fact that he floated two feet bove the chest.

Just beyond, through the open door, the throneroom could be seen. The bright red carpet that normally ran the length of the hall had been pushed aside. In the center of the floor a small demon labored.

Death rose to his knees, dusted the unnaturally colored chalk from his hands, and stood back to survey his handiwork. On the floor was a brightly colored disk thirteen feet in diameter. Within this disc were shapes and runes. The colors clashed and played tricks on the eyes. The entire pattern seemed to shift and change.

Death stood there, his eyes open but unseeing, weaving slowly back and forth. He listened for a voice no one else could hear. It was the voice of the wizard's mind. It repeated, for the thousandth time that day, the preparations and procedures for the rites that were to be performed that night. Death waited for the cycle to come around and tell him what to prepare next.

Earlier that day, Death had led a group of soldiers up the rocks and into the wizard's cave. They lit no fire in the hearth and what little light there was came from the candles the soldiers had brought. Death stalked the dusty shelves and cupboards, pushing through cobwebs, here and there disturbing a spider. He would stop and remove the lid from some unlabeled jar. Leaning over, he would sniff. If the contents were as expected, he would chatter briefly, pointing to the jar. A hand would draw it from the shelf. Once, a curious soldier, exploring on his own, cried out and dropped a jar. It shattered, spilling its contents which slithered quickly to the shadows. Death chattered admonishingly and handed the man a small rock crystal to add to the collection in the crates. The tools of magic collected, they returned to the castle by noon.

Now, his instructions received, Death awoke from the trance-like state. The time had come to prepare potions and powders.

It was dusk when the last powder had been grounded and mixed. As its container was placed on the proper spot in the diagram, there came a creaking from the adjoining room, as though some great weight had been gently lowered onto the wood. There

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was silence for a moment, then a shuffling. The wizard appeared at the door.

His eyes were bright, his face more youthful. It was as though he had shed years in his sleep. A vitality radiated from the man. Death could feel it. The guards could feel it, too. As the wizard stepped into the room, every guard, each in his own way, reacted to the sudden flood of energy. Some shifted uneasily at their posts, but most looked immediately and directly in the direction of the wizard. His gaze swept the room, stopping on each man as though drawing some force from him and transmuting it. At last, the eyes came to rest on Death.

Death smiled sheepishly in the light of that gaze and pointed toward his masterpiece. The wizard had no need to look at it. He had seen it all in his sleep. He simply nodded. "It's time we begin," he said.

The captain and princess were summoned. In response to the wizard's warning that "Nothing—*nothing* must disturb me once the incantation has begun," the captain surrounded the room with guards. Two stood at the main doors, one at each of the pillars, and one at each of the side doors. All the torches save two were extinguished. These were at either side of the throne. Halfway up the great hall two tall, dimly glowing braziers stood at opposite sides of the drawn circle, just inside the rim. The wizard and Death approached the circle from the end opposite the throne. The placement of their footsteps was predetermined. No part of the design was disturbed. A knife in the wizard's belt flashed in the torchlight. It was thin and unusually long. Its sheen was that of pure silver.

All was still for several moments. Slowly first, then more wildly, the throne began to rock. It pitched backward suddenly. A nearby guard cringed in anticipation of a crash that never came. The throne shot through the air feet-first to stop before the wizard. His hands were raised over his head, his fingers pointing down. He turned his wrists. The throne came upright and settled to the ground. With wizard and subject within the circle, the incantation began.

From a soft, low rumble the wizard's voice rose to a strong and steady tone. This swelled and spread, filling the room. It seemed to come from all around. The pitch shifted and split. One voice became a dozen. Speech issued forth from the corners and walls. An invisible congregation joined in colloquy. Voices behind spoke in no human tongue and were answered from across the room. Guards drew their weapons close and glanced about in fear. The captain shrank back. Only the princess held her ground.

The wizard's mouth no longer moved but a voice still came from him. Death collected two phials and lifted them over his head. As part of a gesture, the wizard swept them up and held them in the air. They smoked and glowed with an eerie light. He flung his arms out. Liquid splashed from the phials, flying toward the braziers. There was a flash from each and cloud of flame. The phials dropped to the floor. Death picked these up and dashed away as the balls of flame rose higher. In their light, two rings of smoke could be seen expanding undiminished, rolling out from the braziers. There was the smell of burning sulphur. Green to the left and yellow to the right, the two rings passed through the wizard and king. They met and crossed be-

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tween the two men. Then, closing like a butterfly's wings, they became one and intertwined.

This single large ring began to rotate along a vertical axis. The voices shifted, rising in pitch and volume. The ring spun faster and faster, until it formed a glowing globe. All that could be seen of the men was where their legs protruded. One high, keening note rose through the noise. It was clear and piercing like the ring of finest crystal. The globe began to fade. And there, where its center would have been, the source of the sound could be seen. It was a single point of light. As the sound became louder, the brilliance increased, sending shadows in all directions. The princess raised a hand as a shield to the blue-white light. The captain pressed his hands to his ears. And the wizard drew his knife.

He squatted to two bowls Death had placed at his sandaled feet. He poured the contents from one to the other, then poured the mixture over the knife. Still squatting, he bowed his head and thrust the knife up toward the light. There was the scream of metal on metal. The smell of lightning filled the air. That brilliant miniature star had been pierced by the point of the dagger. The wizard rose and drew back the knife. He thrust it into the king.

The princess screamed, then froze, for as the knife was withdrawn, not blood but black fluid flowed out. It gushed as though under pressure, splashing on the floor. It soon covered the circle but did not cross its edge. Then, like water on dry sand, the dark liquid sank and vanished. The voices screamed and the wizard stabbed again. The princess started forward. The captain grabbed her. "No," he shouted through the din. "He knows what he's doing." But his voice sounded none too sure.

TWO FIGURES stood on a hill near the castle amid swirling wind and the first tiny flakes of snow. "Can you hear it?" asked the shorter, stockier fellow. The other did not reply. His dark eyes were fixed on the castle. Bright, shifting lights shone through the skylight of the great hall and played on the low-lying clouds.

"They found the wizard," the regent said at last.

"It couldn't be," said Bolfar. There was panic in his voice. "I've been watching the gate. No one has gone in."

There was a moment of silence before the regent spoke. "Of course. What a fool I've been. They brought him in through the escape tunnel. I should have thought of that."

"But what will we do now? Can you stop him?" Bolfar trembled as much from fear as the cold.

The regent ignored the question. "Go to my house and get Darum. Pack the books on witchcraft. If I can stop their plan, we will rouse the townsfolk in the morning and attack the castle."

"And if you fail?"

"Then we will have to flee." His voice lacked all emotion.

The shorter man made as if to say something, but only nodded. He turned and descended the hill. The regent remained. He watched for a while, then began a spell of his own.

THE DRAWBRIDGE had been pulled up as added protection that night. The soldiers on duty felt as secure as one could considering what was occurring inside the castle. The noise and lights from the throne room were distracting to the few guards that re-

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mained on the walls. No one noticed the darkness that rose like a creeping shadow from the moat. By the laws of another world, ratsnakes were climbing the walls.

THE GREAT HALL shook with the sound. Beams creaked and dust fell from above. The knife still blazed with white-hot brilliance. The wizard raised it out before him, holding it in both hands. He opened his hands and the knife dropped toward the floor. With a sharp crack, it penetrated and stuck in the marble. The voices stopped. The knife quivered. The light flowed from it to the floor. The silence seemd as loud as the noise had been. The pattern began to glow.

For a moment the captain thought he had heard cries from outside but now there was only the hiss of a chill wind that blew in under the doors.

The pattern was brighter, lighting the scene from below. Death ran about the circle gathering cups of powder, handing them up to the wizard. The man dumped these into the braziers, first into one then the other. After each he made signs and gestures. The charcoal sputtered and hissed. Then slowly there arose a deep, heavy thumping, more felt than actually heard. The pattern pulsed in time. The wizard knelt and drew a sign with chalk the demon supplied. He stood and straddled the mark, his hands outstretched to the sides. Scratching was heard from the braziers as though animals played in the fire. The rhythm and strength of the beat increased. The wizard clapped his hands together. The voices surged forth. Tendrils of smoke curled from the coals. Their colors matched those of the floor.

The thin strands thickened and rose. High above they flattened and spread, forming a disc-shaped cloud. The wizard chanted. Words of an ancient language mixed with one that was yet to be heard. The colors of smoke swirled and mingled. They gained a light of their own. In time a pattern emerged, a mirror image of the one below. A pounding came from the door.

One of the men there opened it and leaned out. He turned and waved for the captain. "Sir," said the man outside, "it's the ratsnakes. They're coming this way." Behind him, a writhing black carpet was advancing through the windblown snow.

"Do what you can to stop them," the officer shouted. The man started to speak, then nodded. "Yes, sir." He turned to face the snakes. The captain slammed the door, and threw the bar into place. He turned to a nearby man. "Tell the other guards in the room. Have them all come here." The man took off running and snakes came from under the door.

The captain ran to the side, drew his sword, and hacked at the pile of carpet. The guards chopped down with their swords and axes. The snakes were still coming in. A dark flowing mass with hundreds of eyes and red, flickereing tongues spread out over the floor. An archer dropped to his knees and flattened his bow to the ground. Each arrow skewered several serpents. There was a flash of black and a cry of pain. A snake had struck the bowman's neck. "Stay on your feet. Your boots will protect you." The captain threw down a piece of carpet and wedged it under the door. The princess had lighted a torch and was keeping the snakes at bay.

Hearing the commotion, Death turned to see the advancing tide. He ran to the wizard and tugged at the end of his coat. The wizard continued

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to chant. He did not look, but *knew*. In response to an unspoken command, Death swept up a jar and ran to the side of the circle. Spreading gray powder along the edge, he made a full circumference. The wizard flicked his wrist. The powder flashed. The circle on which they stood rose into the air.

It was so thin that seen edge-on it seemed not to be there at all. Below there was nothing, a deep impenetrable darkness. Snakes fell over the edge. A thrown knife that had missed its mark slid clattering along the floor. This too went over the edge. There was no sound of it hitting bottom. One snake moved unnoticed away from the battle. It climbed a straight-backed chair. From there it climbed a stancheon to the red bunting which hung from above.

The voices sang. The wizard was in a trance. In his open palms were smoldering lumps of charcoal. The smell was of burning flesh. Hearing a *plop*, Death spun around. A large snake had dropped from above. It eyes had an unearthly gleam. It spotted the wizard and headed his way. The wizard wore no boots. Death ran between the king and the wizard. He pulled the knife from the floor. As the snake struck, Death leaped. They fell together, its fangs buried deep in his chest. As his body spasmed, Death drove the blade into the snake.

Fire burst in the wizard's hands. The charcoal turned to ash. Sparks were jumping from his finger-tips as he stepped closer to the king. His fingers touched each temple and the old man rose from his chair. The *voices rose to a terrible wail, as* though trumpets were in their midst. The king shuddered and shook as the cloud came down from above. It passed over and through the men. The king had a golden glow. The wizard pressed a palm to the old man's chest. There was a boom and flash of light. Like a child's rag doll, the king was flung to the throne. He stirred slightly and blinked his eyes. The voices began to recede. The smoke dissipated. The pattern returned to the floor. The wizard let his *shoulders slump; his long night's work* was through. The king had been revived.

Soldiers stood about wiping their blades. The last of the snakes had been killed. The princess ran to her father who lay slumped in his chair, breathing in short gasps. He looked up at her dully. "I have seen the most terrible things," he said. His voice was weak. "Help me to my chambers. I need rest."

As guards carried the king away, the wizard looking drained and beaten, turned to the captain. "It will be some time before he fully regains his strength. You must—"

The words stuck in his throat as he looked at the floor before him. He dropped to his knees. His huge scarred hands lifted the tiny limp figure. He crushed the snake's skull between thumb and forefinger. He pulled the fangs from Death's chest. Thick fingers touched the body gently. The eyes that returned to the captain were red-lined and watery. "He's dead," said the wizard. The sound was of pained disbelief.

The wizard rose. His head bowed, he looked down at the frail corpse. A tear dropped and mingled with greenish blood. The wizard's massive chest rose and fell with a giant sob. Then another followed another. Deeper and deeper came the breaths. Ever more rapidly. That great ugly head jerked up. Sadness had turned to anger, and anger to burning hate.

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His head swiveled, his eyes staring as though seeing through the walls. He stopped suddenly, his nostrils flared, his lip curled back in a snarl. He had spotted the unseen quarry. He shoved the captain aside, knocking him to the floor. "Wait!" the captain cried. "Stop. Where are you going?"

The wizard heard none of this.

THE AIR was thick with snow. A sharp wind slapped waves against the stern of the boat. The icy spray settled on the two men who were storing things on board. Only the regent was still on dry land. "Hurry with those things," he shouted against the wind. "As soon as the king gains his wits he'll have his men after us."

Bolfar was working frantically. Beads of sweat dotted his brow despite the frigid air. "I worry more about their wizard," he said.

The regent had turned away and was tying shut the neck of a sack. "The wizard is no danger," he shouted over his shoulder. "Whatever they held over his head to get him to revive the king is settled now. He would have no reason to come after me." From behind him, there was a *whoosh* and a blast of hot air, as though the door of some gigantic furnace had blown open. He turned. The entire boat was ablaze. The men were screaming. Their hair and clothes and flesh were aflame. They fell into the water. It hissed and boiled and steamed but did not extinguish the flames. The regent whirled around.

Emerging from the darkness was a giant of a man. He was dark and hairy. There was frost on his beard where his breath had frozen. In his left hand he held some small thing. "Who—who are you?" stammered the regent.

The wizard thrust his right hand toward the regent. A ghostly extension of it flew forth and buried itself wrist-deep in the man's chest. It lifted him screaming into the air and swung him once in an arc. The regent flew from the hand and dashed against the rocks. Where his chest had been there was only a gaping cavity. Yet the regent still lived.

He made as if to speak, but no sound came from his lips. He jerked about spastically, trying to rise, and pointed to the hand in the air. Broken ribs jutted from between its fingers. It clutched a beating heart.

It moved through the air to hover over the rock where the wizard had laid the body of the demon. The fist began to clench. The regent bolted upright. A hollow, gurgling cry issued from his mouth. The heart burst. Blood poured down on the demon. The regent fell back, mouth and chest agape, eyes rolled back in his head. Almost immediately fist and heart and blood began to fade to nothing.

The wizard bent forward. Death stirred. His eyes opened dreamily and looked about. Then the lids descended. Death had fallen asleep.

THE TINY DEMON frolicked in the snow near ths entrance to the cave. They had no such thing where he had come from. And despite his years in this world, he still found the cold white stuff fascinating. Occasionally, he would pause and gaze out over the lake at the fishing boats. Most were manned, at least in part, by soldiers of the king. The sun glinted off glistening piles of fish in the bottom of each boat. The lake had been underfished for so long that it was now grossly overstocked. The people of the town would have plenty of food for winter.

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But with all this, there was one image that kept floating up in Death's mind. It was of a huge hairy face with frost on its beard. The mouth was smiling and the eyes had tears in them. It seemed unlikely that it could be the wizard's face. But although he could not remember where he had seen it, Death had no doubt that it was real.

"Death!" bellowed the voice from the cave. Death jumped and ran. "Death, where are you?"

Death came in through the window, leaving a trail of tiny wet clawprints on the sill.

"Look at that!" cried the wizard, stabbing a finger toward the floor. Some broken pieces of crockery lay among the dust balls. "Somebody broke my jar of newts. It was probably those soldiers. And *you*," he said, leaning forward, "were supposed to prevent things like that. How am I going to finish my experiment without any newts?" The wizard paced about frantically, pulling at his hair. "They're all hibernating by now. I'll have to wait until spring. And it's all your fault." The wizard made a grab for something on the shelf.

Death ducked as a metal plate crashed against the wall. The wizard came forward brandishing a soup ladle. "I'll have your head," he shouted. Death leaped out the window, the wizard went through the door. And the chase was on.

—PAUL HALPINE

Days of Stone (cont. from page 73)

father."

IT WAS A commercial break. Mrs. Fishbine thought of food and decided to take a snack. It was snowing hard and the window was painted with frost. She turned off the television. Everything was quiet. The house didn't creak, the faucet didn't drip. She couldn't hear the wind. So she made noise, but it didn't work, for every word, squeak, caugh, and snizzle seemed to come from another place, somewhere far away. She stood up and stamped her foot on the floor, but the sharp crack didn't have anything to do with her. It was a noise, but the connection of events wasn't causal. It was parallel, synchronistic. The world of sight and sound were only apparently connected.

But one of the words was dying, and Mrs. Fishbine had the feeling, the intuition, that simple, straightforward logic would have to break down, just a little. It was as if everything was now beginning to die and fall apart. What difference was David? she asked herself. He was only a second for his father, a bad image, so, of course, he would have to decay first.

Mrs. Fishbine fought the solid silence of the stone house and walked downstairs to the kitchen. Her feet padded on the carpet, but they were not her feet, they were a thousand ghosts occupying the same space. She felt heavy, but she was too brittle to melt away and become a dead sound.

She turned all the lights on—her house, squat and crumbling, would become a nightbeacon, a flare against death. She prepared a tray of cheese and crackers and tea to take upstairs. Tommorow would be another day, she thought.

Tomorrow she would count the dead.

—JACK DANN

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Paul Novitski is not a prolific author. Under the name of "Alpajpuri" he has published two stories: "The Wind She Does Fly Wild" (AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION, August, 1973) and "Asylum in the Concrete" (FANTASTIC STORIES, February, 1975). Both were unusual in the way they probed emotional themes, and readers have waited with growing impatience for his next. Here it is.

THE LOSER AT SOLITAIRE

PAUL DAVID NOVITSKI

Illustrated by JOE STATON

He paused before the circledoor to run a thumb down his breast. Black pseudosilk fell open, revealing other arms. He shivered: the air in the alcove was cool. His four brown hands splayed trembling fingers. Lax, we're here! The slideway mob roared by, behind him now, but his flesh still broke with flashfire remembrance of the crush.

He pulled a card from one sleeve. This was the right tower; now to find the apt. One dark hand felt for the packet tucked between his ribs and left hip.

He jabbed the center of the circledoor: the door irised and he stepped into a low-lit room, cubical, with couches and another door. The one behind him shut with a whisk, squeezing off all but a whisper of the slideway roar. His arms relaxed; the muscles of his legs; his lower back. The air blew cool across his forehead.

He swallowed. If this was the antechamber, the next door was that of the tower elevator. He jabbed the center of the circledoor and stepped—

—against its smooth, cool surface. (Stopped on twenty fingertips.) His breath cut between his teeth. Void it, what's the protocol? An eye the size of his palm (he hissed again, hopped back) opened before him, red iris and glassblack pupil. Recovered, he leaned closer to squint. In the center of the eye, a miniature of himself squinted back, up-side down (narrow skull, bare scalp, long face: all dark), as if to discover some telling flaw in his fleshed self.

"Idee?"

He jerked around—

"Idee?"

—and turned back. The room was empty. The eye blinked once.

"Idee?"

"Oh, uh, Rover Decca Tee Jay Cee Em Arr Zero Zero Zero."

Something behind the red iris flickered.

"Arnarr," said the door.

"Uh, what?"

"Arnarr," it said again. "Rest and recupe."

"Uh, yeah."

"Have a nice time."

"Right." He nearly smiled. "You too."

"Thank you," said the door. "Who

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are you visiting?"

"Uh, Zo."

"Confirming." The eye was swallowed up in the surface of the door. Ten, eleven seconds passed. He felt like whistling—shuffling—something. Then, "Come in. Nice time. Hold rail."

The door dilated and he stepped into the lift.

He was a rover—he knew the feel of thrust. The lift swept up—no, circularly, in a spiral, up and out and finally straight sideways to skid to a stop with a hiss.

The door irised and he stepped into a room, and knew immediately that it was somehow wrong.

It wasn't just people. They sprawled on pillows and on one another, chatting, laughing quietly, or sleeping, or staring. (On first glance: a preponderance of racial mixes.) He counted twenty-three. (On second glance: a preponderance of make-up.) The walls were painted in some recent Guernican Bosch: a psychoscape of violence done to innocents in clayey reds, browns, yellows, accentuated with a fluorescent black that bit his eyes. The painted shapes undulated on the walls as he moved into the room. Painted faces screamed at him from the floor.

He looked up, and realized that the room was much higher than he thought. No, the walls canted inward. And (that tension in his calves) the floor had been set at the slightest pitch. He breathed deeply, tried to relax.

An arp farfisa warbled gently from hidden speakers. (And beyond its harmonics, another sound, dissonant, distant, tugged at his temples.) No one in the room moved to accept or reject him. Some simply stared, at him or elsewhere. His four dark

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hands clenched under black pseudosilk. Some of the people wore random bits of clothing, most had painted their skins. Several glowed dimly. In one corner two identical men—were they men?—possibly—lay propped on their elbows, heads together, whispering, grinning, leering at him, their silver teeth barely touching, their glasses clinking rims.

Unnerved: he noticed their lips were moving in synch. So there *was* a mirror. But which—? He pulled from his/their gaze and glanced past other eyes, finally found a pair that were focused and knelt. "Is Zo here?"

The woman laughed. "Is Zo here?" she said.

He tried to smile. "Yeah. Zo here?"

"Yeah," she said, and laughed again. "Zo here?"

He smiled, then frowned.

Several others nearby laughed, too. "Is Zo here?" they said. "Yeah. Zo here?" Amid their laughter he knelt before the laughing woman, feeling awkward, feeling hot. He stood uncertainly, licked his lips and swallowed, and moved again among the bodies on the floor. Could anyone see the bulge of his second set of shoulders?

Quick tight fingers gripped his shin: he looked down. A skeletal woman lounged there, her eyes sunk to the bottom of their sockets, her head bare except for one round patch that streamed away, white silk. He tried to pull his leg away but her fingers were like metal bands. Her thin lips moved: he crouched down to hear.

"What is your preference?" Her voice was like a boot in gravel.

He shook his head.

"Don't be shy." Her eyes gripped his. "You come to a shriek, you meet the tup. Suck, fuck, vicarious arousal, you name it, we got it. Now over here—"

"I'm sorry, you don't under—"

Her fingers sank suddenly into his flesh. She continued without interruption, "—we got Zaire and Ezra, he's het, she's home, two fine studs with gump and go. Just behind them, Iroko, she's het. Fillipi's across the room. Good home stud, he'll suck you nice and tight. Nice thighs, that Fillipi. Or maybe—" and her eyes shifted from his, and back— "just maybe you go for the vikes, yeah? Where's that Randall? He must be in the shriek." She jerked his leg to catch his gaze. "You go for that, rover? Randall, he'll jack for you to watch. Getcher vikes, yeah? Rover? Yeah?"

With an effort he pulled his leg free of her grasp, rubbed the flesh through his cloak. "Sorry," he muttered. "Not interested. I'm looking—"

"Not interested!" The woman moved her gaunt face to one side, keeping her eyes on his. "Now willya listen to this one. Not interested! Now rover, I tellya, folks come to me from outastate, they say Del, fix us up with a juicy one, yeah? You hear me, rover? They come some distance, take some trouble, pass up all the tups in Nyork for mine. And now you come in here from goddam outaspace and tell me, not *in*terested!"

"I'm looking for Zo!" He said it too loudly: heads turned, voices stopped their background murmur. Even the tones of the arp farfisa seemed to fade.

"Ah," breathed Del at last. She shook her head, slowly stabbing the air with her cheekbones. Her shock of white hair rustled behind her. "So you're one of them." And shook her head again, the flesh beside her nose creasing in distaste.

He felt as if that moment, that silence, those stares could last forever

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if he let them. He shrugged aside the inertia. "Where's Zo?"

Del shrugged, and nodded toward a farther door.

He picked his way quickly across (of course;) the trapezohedral room, found the center of the circledoor and jabbed instant orifice—

—Hands reached out and snatched him into chaos. Naked bodies writhed beneath the naked scream of wallspeakers (*that* sound—): a thick raging forest of oily flesh. He gagged and struggled against the hands. Twists of faces flashed around him as colored strobes erupted from the floor and ceiling. Stalagmite—stalactite—they smeared grotesque frescoes of after-image across his vision. He choked on the thick sweet smoke and stumbled through—

—free!

Groping blindly: a narrow hallway livid with the shapes of passion at his feet, then cool wet wall pressed against his cheek. In the flashing dimness he caught the outline of another door: four hands fumbled, frantic: the wall dissolved and he toppled out—

Abrupt silence rang away.

On cold concrete, he got to his feet, staggered to the railing to wrap the cold tubing with fingers and thumbs. (A pulpit overlooking hell.) His lungs filled to brimming and then breath rushed, washing the shreds of his panic into the abyss at his feet. Distantly below, electric insects crawled before the lattice-light towers that loomed around him, probing the low-slung sky. He was halfway up a tower like those, and wondered, how many others shared this crowded, lonely view tonight? Between the urban scrapers, the lights of the megalop spread a spark-dusted rug raveling into the smog. To the west a molten zipway streamed into grey shadows and out. To the east, the wide scar of darkness called Park.

In his ears the cool wind whispered rumors of thunder deep in the glassteel chasms. Down there people and machines stampeded wild, beating out the hysterical rhythms of loving, dying, being born. Alone, he clung to the quiet between.

He lifted his gaze to the close grey sky that cottoned the stars, clenching him too in its suffocating fist. Sudden nausea brought tears, brought chin to chest. His vision opened over the dazzle. Ah, for freefall! Freedom compelled. Climb the cold rail, leap away, swim free into empty air—

The city leapt at him:

Faster and closer and—

"You!"

His head jerked up:

She stood frozen in shadow.

And melted out into pearl light.

Dark hair swept back from her opal face; black stars shone above dark wings of cheek, a wide nose, broad lips familiar with disdain.

Her lips were cold. Her eyes cut. "Why you here?"

"You," he said, and swallowed.

Her eyes said *oh*?

Fifteen of his fingers went to the fold of his sleeve; two withdrew the card. "Manhattan Seven, Tower Jay Three, Apt Eighty-Two Sixty-Five." He glanced up: "Zo."

Her eyebrows arched. "Am I?"

"Look, there isn't much time." He groped below his left arms, down his ribs for the packet. "My shuttle spaces in three hours."

Her black eyes flickered like flame on ice, to his arms, and arms. One nostril flared, pulling lip with it. "So," she said, "rover, you come for a shriek? Well hop back in, help yourself. But don't spec trips from me!"

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"No," he said. "You don't understand. I didn't know there was going to be a . . . a shriek . . . if I had, then maybe I wouldn't have—"

"*Rover!*" She spat. Flecks flew past him, over the railing. "You spend your life spacing from star to star, all fine and lonesome, just soaking in all that emptiness. And then you hit port just to dig a little joy from us grounders, yeah? Well, apologies, rover, but this cunt's dry!"

The green plasty packet shook in his fingers. "No," he said. "Wait. I brought this for you—"

She seethed away. "You jazz."

"But—"

"Space off!"

He couldn't move.

Her eyes sliced around with black chill. A blade in her hand. Her voice did the cutting: "I'm here to be alone."

He took a breath. "Why do you think—"

The knife began to move.

He backed away, licked his lips. He swept at the electric expanse with his hands. "How can you stand to live like this? The crowding, the noise, these crazy shrieks! It's terrible—"

"Yes! Yes!" Her teeth hissed. "It's filthy, it's crazy, it's garbage all around us! So space for your fuggin stars and let us forget there's someplace else!" The citylight glinted at the corners of her eyes, at the tip of the blade. And then she lunged forward, but (he flinched) past him, to grab the railing with her mahogany hands. She let the silence stream away; her eyes on something beyond the smog.

The cool wind sifted through the folds of his cloak, curled across the ridges of his face, his back. Hot sweat from the slideway and that one frantic minute in the shriek turned icy. He shivered and fought the sudden impulse to surround her with all arms. Desire surged so strong and clear his muscles danced—

He turned to the city and gripped the rail beside her. Shoulders close, not touching. "You've . . . been out here since the shriek began?"

Her eyes were focused on the grey, close horizon. She snorted softly. "For a long time Del made me stay inside and tup, but . . . now she lets me come out here alone." A muffled laugh tore loose from her chest. "See how I get my way."

"Who's Del?"

"Don't ask. Our gracious host."

"But I thought—"

"I just live here," she said, her voice tinted bitter. "There are six of us in Del's tup." Then her face flickered, twice. Her eyes sliced sideways. "Rover, didn't I rap you leave?"

He started to say too many things at once, shut his mouth and rustled the packet. "Just whiff."

With a *tss* (he thought: she pulled tongue from palate) Zo took the green plasty, unfolded and squinted. Turned it over, eyes skimming. (The knife was gone—when?—) She glanced up with narrow eyes, mouth set. "What's this?"

He smiled. "I think you know . . . "

She puckered the packet at the top and sniffed. "I don't know you, rover."

"I got your name from Sergi."

"No shit."

It took him a moment to realize it was a question; another to realize it was rhetorical.

She poked a finger into the packet, touched it to her tongue. "Hmm." Tapped out a thin line on her forefinger, snuffed it up. She held the other nostril shut, inhaled loudly.

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Gasped through her mouth. "All right."

He laughed.

Her eyes went hard. "You know Sergi." The packet was gone—where?

His laughter stopped. "I knew him."

"You were mates."

This again was a question, but not—"We grew apart."

She sniffed. Her eyes were liquid.

He cleared his throat. "Sergi couldn't keep spacing with me. He said I was insane."

"Are you?"

"Of course."

She did laugh then, tickling his scalp with the sound of it. "So you got my fix from Sergi." She chuckled, turned, leaned back against the rail. "Good of him to keep tabs. I haven't heard from him since—" And again, that flicker in her eyes. "But like I said, I'm through tupping."

"I didn't come for that."

Soft snort. "You're lying."

"You know."

Her head jerked; she shuddered, frowned.

"I said you know," he repeated. "When someone's lying."

She turned away. "When I whiff." Glanced back. "I can feel you now." A mild sneer.

"But you need that." He nodded toward her hip, toward the probable pocket.

She came away from the railing with a jerk. "What you mean? I can read you good as any damn stud you think you're so mysterious rover you think you're so opaque?"

He had to smile. "I don't believe anyone's opaque to you."

"Damn right." Zo took a slow step back. The quietness of her voice made him look down: that blade was out again. "Damn right," she said again. She ducked her chin and from the tops of her eyes stared at him.

"Hey!" he said. "Now listen, don't jump to con—"

"Fuggin minute, rover. Explain yourself." The knifetip flicked from side to side.

The railing bit into his hip. "Wait," he said. "Listen. Just because I know who you—" His throat clenched: the knife's tip paused at his larynx. "Look in my mind," he said hoarsely. "You can see I'm no powder cop."

She sighed (from disappointment? annui?) and tucked the knife away. "No," she said in a tired voice. "No, you're too wet to be a fuggin cop."

He bit his lips. "There's more."

She breathed deeply. "Yeah."

"Sergi."

She closed her eyes. "Go on."

"I . . . read your stuff."

Her eyes came open. "You did know him."

He shrugged.

She turned. "What did you . . . "

"Hmm?"

" . . . think?"

He opened his mouth, shut it. "Don't you know? Read me."

"Yeah," she breathed, "but tell me."

He shrugged again. "It got me off. I mostly liked your villanelles. But your first book was better."

She looked away. In the silence they both shivered. "We're cold," she said. "Let's go—"

"Not back in there."

"—somewhere else." At her jab the balcony door irised, releasing a snarl of color and sound that engulfed them and swept them inside.

THE CROWD shot down blurred lengths of bright avenue. Towers, immense in the night, glided by on each side. Zo stood close to him on

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the slideway, one hand tight on the sleek black cloak that obscured his other arms from anonymous stares. The slideway skithed beneath their feet, voices clamored all around. To their left another torrent of faces flew past.

The shouting from the mouths in the faces of the crowd drove iron spikes through the thin bone of his temples. Clothed flesh pressed against clothed flesh. Beneath black pseudosilk his fingers clenched and shook; beneath pale lips his teeth did the same.

A brilliance loomed ahead over the throng of hairy crania. Zo nudged his ribs and worked over into slower lanes.

"Where?" he shouted into her ear, amber, translucent.

"Caffy!"

As the slideway nexus neared, they floundered through a turbulence of hot bodies. He panicked, lost for one wild instant in the milling, then skipped after Zo onto a side strip that carried them into warm smells—

His cloak had come open: she caught a hand. "Who are you?"—brown smells—

"I don't know."

—caff brown—

"Your name?"

—steaming caff—

"Don't have one."

—caffeine dissolved in hot sacrolact—

"You are insane!"

—through the wide arch, people swarmed among red shapes, under gray. Beyond the caffy scene, the megalop fell away into sick night all around. He glanced back: the slideway crowd crisscrossed the bright archway that stood propped like a holographic cut-out against the cityscape. But this caffy was on ground level, the view was from tower-top. Had they taken the lift up instead of down? Which was real and which holie?

The caffy floor was defined by scattered red tables and stools, blurred by streams of people walking, laughing, chatting in transit, sitting and sipping, their voices combining in a surf that surged right and left in merging waves that crashed down around him—

Zo, oblivious to his disorientation, was drifting through the table array. Her muscles moved visibly beneath thin cloth. He hurried to catch up, constructing a soloship console behind his eyes:

Through the field of red stars, his plotted vector in luminescent green. Black, the trace of his guide:

Zo sat at a table, a thick disc of red plasty on a tapered column. He sat. They punched studs. Twin streams of caff steamed up from the table and snaked into popped-up cups.

"I like to sit with the crowd behind me."

Zo's teeth rippled through the heat rising from her cup as she sipped, and grinned. "I never met a rover who wasn't claustro."

He shrugged. "More people in this caffy right now than I ever met off-planet."

The slim green packet in her fingertips, Zo tapped a blob of powder into her cup, swirled it in with a spoon. "How long you been spaced?"

"Training starts at birth—uh, no thanks."

"Suit yourself. But I meant, how old—"

"*Oh.* I'm in my mid-twenties, somewhere. Einsteinian warp and biofreeze aren't calibrated clearly enough to measure age exactly." He took a sip of caff, let it invade the crannies of his mouth with its rich bit-

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terness. "I was seven when I first soloed. That was more than sixty years ago, earthtime. You and I are three generations apart."

Her eyes glistening, she smiled crookedly. "But who's older?" Then she blinked, hard. (He thought: it must be coming on again.) She licked her lips, said, "Age is a function of living."

He frowned. "From one of your poems?"

She yawned and looked away; his penis erected immediately.

He cleared his throat. "I met a rover once, who spaced into Draco base in an old model soloship, one of the first ever built."

Zo's eyes caught his in passing. "So you dabble in antiques."

"Yeah." He smiled. "People and things. This rover, she thought she'd been spaced only fifteen years earthtime. Turned out she'd been gone more than a century."

That got her eyes focused. "A century!"

"Those early soloships were unstable at high cee—relativity weirds out the fusion drives. Most of the first rovers haven't come back yet, probably never will." He paused to sip his caff. "When she was back one month and finally fully comprehended what happened, she cracked lock."

Zo's head came up. "What?"

"She cra—she opened her airlock. Without a suit."

"Oh."

"You ever see a slug? With salt?"

She stared, blinked.

"A slug is like a snail," he said, "without a—"

"I don't—"

"Just look!" His four hands swept the air. "A lot has changed since that rover spaced in twenty-fifty. Tech, culture, lango, people—even since I last spaced twenty years ago. That rover, she just had too much to catch up on. With friends, especially. You have to start from scratch each time."

Zo squinted at him. "Why didn't she just space out again?"

"Most do, these days," he said. "But the early rovers weren't trained for longterm spacing like we are now. Back then, it was all a sequence of oneshots. Roving wasn't a vocation." He sipped. "They were just earthies with astronav tech, they weren't brought up in space like me. No limb grafts, no gland transplants. Just earthies like you in the wide, empty stars." He sighed. "Yeah, I knew three rovers who cracked lock when they first despaced."

Zo laughed suddenly. "You pompous zero."

He frowned, grinned. His penis shifted stiffly beneath his cloak. The caffy babble behind him was finally dissociable from the image of human bodies, just a low white noise, a pink noise, like a beach at body temperature. Out the windows—that is, in the holie before him—the smog of the Nyork panorama had nearly acquired a visual warmth.

He leaned back in the soft plasty chair, fingers laced behind his neck, hot caff cupped before him in warming palms. "Zo, how'd you end up in this city, anyway?"

"Hmm?" She roused herself. "Why'd I come?" She laughed harshly. "Default, I guess." She swirled the dregs in her cup and tossed it back, grimaced, sighed, punched for more. A tap from the packet. "Addictive."

"The powder?" He flinched at her sharp glance. "The caff."

"Nyork," she said. "Well, both. The caff only makes me jitter, but the city . . . Krice. I've been here a year,

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two years, and I'm still not easy. Del came through Coover—"

"Vancouver?"

She blinked. "Yeah. You been there?"

"That was the last address I had for you. Hell of a time tracking you down."

She shrugged. "Del came through Coover signing folks on to a media troupe she runs. I tried out, she seemed to spec I could make it in the holies. She brought me back to Nyork." Zo laughed hoarsely, shook her head. "I turned out to be a pretty shitty actor. I dunno, internal emotional repressions fuzzed the signal when they tried to record. I don't care. That's a long time back. I felt pretty bum, but I got another chance. Del was forming a tup. She had five others—one of each—I guess I completed her set. So I stayed."

"You like it here?"

She sighed through caff steam. "Oh, it was great at first. I really psyched on Nyork—Coover's so *dead*—and tupping with Del and the others was okay. I always did like sex. Del invited all the top holios and cubejocks to her shrieks. Some of them are deep folks. But I really fell sick of all the squirmy little egos oozing up to touch the stars, rap to them, roll them." She sipped, swallowed. "Tuppers used to come up to me and rap, Krice, Zo, I just sucked off Bobi Berg! *Shit*. I mean, droll, man. Berg's just a cubejock with a lot of airtime. She's nothing special."

Zo leaned forward on her elbows and sloshed her cup of caff as she spoke. "That's the big diff between the stars and other folks. Berg and Russ Jones and this new dude Armande Seuly, they're all bright emoters in the holies, but they're just human if you scope close. The techs worked years to make the holies like real, and then the actors live in such a surreal world, off-set. Del and the rest, they're just like leeches on the stars. Ahh—" Zo blew out a belch. "Damn that caff," and took another sip.

He accepted her next offer of powder. It added a metallic taste to his caff, and aftertaste of ozone. He swirled it in his cup and said, "I couldn't live here."

"Oh, you can always scape when it gets too screamy."

"But where?" He looked past her face to where the ordered yellow stars of the megalop blinked beneath the mute, gray sky. Trapped in a holie of an artificial world—

"Here," said Zo, "or out on the balcony, or down in libry central on east forty-two. When I'm really bum I slide over to the museum on sevenny-eight and scope the cars and the flowers and the old clothes—"

"For truth?" he said. "I've always wanted to smell a flower."

"Oh, you can't smell these. They're in cases, and I spec they're plasty anyway. But the colors are nice."

His cup clicked empty on the red tabletop. "In Nyork," he said, "on all the earth, there's so much contant stim—all the people, the lights, the noise, all the media pouring in—it builds up a scar tissue around your brain. It immunizes you against stimulation. So then you have to go to such extremes to stim yourselves, you have to turn up the volume so much higher to get through all that static. Like powder, and like shrieks. If you didn't blow your bodies like that, you'd never even know you were—"

"*Hey!* Willya scope the rover!"

He jerked around, pulling the cloak over his other arms. His gut trickled cold.

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A heavy man in worker green, eyes sullen and bloodshot, bellowed again. "What's the matter, rover? Flaunt it if ya got it!" His head lolled over to address the caffy crowd. "Hey, this dude's got four arms!"

He wanted very badly to dematerialize. His legs raised him up when he wanted to sit still. Peripherally he saw Zo's worried face. Curiosity shimmered out across the caffy in intersecting waves.

"Show us, ya rover!" yelled the worker and ripped away the cloak. (He clutched his arms to his chest, dark bare arms against a mat of black hair.) The worker brayed.

And shoved him over tables, into chairs. People scrambled, someone screamed.

Shaken, he stumbled to his feet and brushed the sweat from his eyes. Saw the worker's open mouth descending amid a face of drunken fury—

A quick blur of blue steel: everyone froze.

Zo crouched before the drunk, her clean blade glinting in one hand. The worker stumbled back, a wondering groan uttered somewhere in his throat.

The caffy tensed.

Zo hissed, "Back! you fuggin cock," and swung the blade, tracing a line across the worker's chest that quickly turned dark and trickled. He stumbled backward, tripped on a chair, and backed stumbling through the tables and faces. His mouth, a limp black hole, shrank into the distance of the room.

Zo laughed quietly, wiped the blade's tip on her pants.

Trembling on weak legs, he bent to pick up his torn cloak. "Thanks—" His voice was nearly inaudible.

Zo shrugged. "No score, rover, it's jive. I almost wished he'd opted to scramble, I'd have sliced him good." The caffy's murmur grew again, a hundred eyes lanced—

He pulled the cloak more tightly around himself, mumbled, "Let's get out of here," and they left, one shaken, one smug.

IN THE BUSTLE of the slideway:

"You okay?"

"Fine."

"Rover, you're green."

"I said I'm all right! Got to—got to get back to the shuttle, got to—" Faces and voices surged around him. It would have been so easy just to fall away—

"Hey, rover."

He tried to focus on her face.

She laid a hand on his shoulder. "You know," she said in his ear, "you disgust me."

"I love you," he said.

"You make me sick. You don't move me in the slightest."

"Zo—"

"Give my hate to Sergi."

"Will do."

And then she was gone.

Slideways, side ways, bright blurring and jumbled faces swirled around and down—

At last he fell through into the darkness of the shuttle, lay broken on the bunk. Cool, in utter black. The pressure in his gut climbed up his choked throat and squeezed out through his eyes in acid streams. Alone, he lay sobbing in the silence.

—PAUL DAVID NOVITSKI

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This one is straight science fiction—and perhaps Utley's best for us yet!

THE MOUSE RAN UP THE CLOCK

STEVEN UTLEY

ILLUSTRATED by RICHARD OLSEN

She had left grasses forty-five million years away, in the Cretaceous Period, and the earth here was mutilated by erosion. She ran, fell, got up, slid, fell again. Cockroaches as big as shoes and brick-colored dinosaurs as small as birds fled before her.

And, behind her: Ceratosaurus, seven meters long from the tip of its stiffly outstretched tail to the rhinoceras-like horn on its snout, stalking her across the Jurassic highlands.

And, further behind: the four black angels, the dogs of Time, sniffing along her trail, slowly but surely running her to ground.

Flushed by her blundering approach, a cloud of strange insects erupted from a clump of ferns. She ploughed through the swarm, batting at it with her arms, then hurled herself against the bole of a young gingko and hugged it for support. Her clothes were plastered to her flesh where they had not been shredded away by spiny flora. The air was hot and thick. Breathing it was like trying to inhale warm porridge. She clung to the tree, gasping, and regarded the dinosaur.

Ceratosaurus was now less than a quarter of a kilometer behind her, weaving among the trees, placing its splayed feet with care as it moved over the rough ground. The dinosaur carried its body parallel to the earth, with its tooth-filled maw open, its small but wickedly taloned forearms spread as though to affectionately embrace her once she had been overtaken. She had seen the last of Ceratosaurus' line in the Cretaceous: Tyrannosaurus rex; much longer, much heavier, with quite a bit less forearm and quite a lot more mouth; the final word in predation.

But Tyrannosaurus had deigned not to notice her. The Tyrant Lizard King had been after larger game, duck-billed hadrosaurs the size of elephants. Ceratosaurus seemed less particular.

She wiped mud from the buckle of her harness and peered at the dial set there. *Recharge 00:01.31.* Ninety-one seconds to go. She tiredly pushed herself away from the gingko and resumed her plodding flight. The dinosaur honked its annoyance and lengthened its stride.

She tumbled, cried out, forced her-

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self onward, thinking wildly, Hold out for just another minute and a half, come on, come *on*, one foot in front of the other now, left right left. Go go go, said the bird.

And she answered herself bitterly, But isn't this what you came here for?

A shrill screaming whine suddenly filled her ears. She shot an alarmed look over her shoulder and promptly tripped over an exposed root. A black-garbed figure dropped onto her as she sprawled on her side in the stiff mud. Strong, gloved hands tugged at her belt.

"We've got you now!" said the dark angel, shrugging off a weak, ineffectual blow.

Then a shadow fell upon them. The dark angel had just enough time to look startled behind his visor before Ceratosaurus' jaws closed over his head and shoulders.

The woman on the ground screamed and rolled to one side as her attacker was jerked kicking into the air. The dinosaur gave its victim a vicious shake. Vertabrae parted with sharp snaps. The creature sidestepped awkwardly and swatted at its original quarry as she hurled herself away and scrambled crab-like into the nearest ravine.

When she got to the bottom, she lurched to her feet and did not risk a backward glance until she had put at least fifty meters between the dinosaur and herself. By then, Ceratosaurus seemed to have already forgotten about her. It squatted above the lip of the ravine and let its hinged jaws work the grisly mass that had been a human being down its gullet.

Her belt buckle beeped. *Recharge 00:00.10.* She thumbed off the safety lock and put a finger on the tab marked ACTIVATE. *.07. .06. .05.* She shot a last, sad look at Ceratosaurus

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and shook her head. *.02. .01.* She pressed the tab. Nothing happened.

Frowning, she checked the dial and stabbed the tab again, savagely. The shrill whining sound repeated itself, and, for a moment, she thought that the chronopak had decided to function properly after all. Then a second black-clad figure materialized less than three meters to her right and launched itself at her. She heard it yell a word just before the moment of impact.

Just after the moment of impact, she landed on her back atop a large, flat-topped rock, eighty million years away.

THE AIR was dry and rather cooler than it had been in the Jurassic Period. She sat upon her high rock, staring out across the desert, toward the silvery glint of sunlit ice among mountain peaks on the horizon.

Not far from the rock, a large sail-backed reptile worried at a carcass. She let her gaze drop to the creature as it braced its forelimbs against the carcass, bit deeply and wrenched off a mouthful of carrion. She could not repress a shudder.

The sail-backed reptile had made no attempt to reach her, but, at the same time, it eyed her constantly as it ate, pausing occasionally to hiss warningly. She dared not descend to the ground. The Permian Period, the last period of the Paleozoic Era, a period marked by continual upheaval of the earth's crust, a time of coal forests, ice caps, deserts, had no giants comparable to Ceratosaurus or Tyrannosaurus. But Dimetrodon, the great fin-back, filled the same ecological niche. Dimetrodon ruled in the Permian. One did not trifle with Dimetrodon.

How easy it would be, the woman thought as the reptile made a brief strangling noise and disgorged a gory fragment of bone, to throw myself down to you. How easy it should have been to let Ceratosaurus catch me. Or to have hurled myself into the path of Tyrannosaurus. I could have stood my ground and let a mastodon trample me. I could just have thrown myself from any high place. I could have gotten myself killed anywhere along the line.

How easy it should be to do the one thing left for me to do.

How impossibly hard it is.

She looked at the dial and sighed. *Recharge 00:29.26. .25. .24.* Twenty-nine minutes, another half an hour, to endure before she could make another jump. *Maybe.* The chronopak had taken considerable punishment. The farther down the line she moved from her proper matrix, the more tenuous her connection with it, the greater the strain on the chronopak's delicate mechanisms. Eighty million years ahead, she knew, the dark angels would be waiting on their own chronopaks. And, while they waited, feverishly analyzing the residue she had left in the Jurassic, determining where she had gone from there and then.

So, she asked herself, where shall we go next? The very early Pre-Cambrian? Just a deep breath, and the methane-ammonia atmosphere will do the job. Or further back than that, perhaps, all the way back to the age of molten Earth, fsst. Instantaneous combustion. At most, at worst, a split-second's pain and horror.

We could go forward for a change. Back to late Mesozoic times. Back to Tyrannosaurus. Drown ourselves in the inland sea of Kansas. Stand on the slopes of Krakatoa. Wait for the nova at Hiroshima.

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We could go back and try to get him again.

She made a disconsolate sound.

Monster, the second dark angel had called her. *Monster.*

No. She checked the dial again. Not a monster.

Only a coward.

THE PALEOCENE Period, the quiet pause between the last evening of the dinosaurs and the first morning of the age of mammals, was Eden. She walked through a forest of immense redwood trees, pausing from time to time to listen to the furry chittering things that had just inherited a planet, and, as she had done in the Permian, she jumped away before her pursuers showed up. But reluctantly.

In the warm dusk of a pre-Columbian summer, it occurred to her that she had neither eaten nor slept for more than twenty hours, not since the morning of June 18, 2266, when she had stolen the chronopak. She watched the stars come out until it was time for her to leave, and then, once again, she had to run to avoid capture by the people in black. When she tried to jump away, her chronopak malfunctioned. She materialized in the Pleistocene only to find that her pursuers had been lucky enough to arrive a full minute ahead of her.

WITH HER HANDS and feet enclosed in globes of some glistening material, she could neither walk nor tamper with her harness controls. She lay upon the hard, cold ground and stared up at the lightening sky. Three black-garbed figures sat nearby. From the west came the muted roar of some triumphant hunting beast.

"How much longer," the woman heard one of the dark angels say to another, "before we can get out of here?"

The other looked at its belt buckle and said, in a woman's voice, "Eight minutes and a few seconds. Don't fret, Perrin."

The one addressed as Perrin chuckled sardonically and turned to the third. "Will you listen to the captain, Beitel? 'Don't fret,' she says. Everything we've run into since leaving home's had too damn many teeth, that last tumble I took can't've done my pak any good, and she tells me not to fret."

The third person gave a sullen grunt.

"My pak's just about ready for the chute, too," the captain said. "But we'll get back. Stop worrying. It won't be much longer."

Perrin gestured at the captive. "What do you think'll happen to her?"

The captain shrugged. "That's no concern of ours. I just want to hand her over at the end of the line and tuck in for a few hours."

"And clean off the grime of the ages." Perrin chuckled again. "I got two-hundred-million-year old blisters."

"*I'm* concerned," said the third person. "Pointer was killed because of her."

"Beitel. . ." The captain's voice trailed off.

Beitel glared at the captive. "I'd like to burn you myself!"

"That's enough," snapped the captain. "Pointer knew the risks. We all did, before we left."

"He's dead."

"He died in the service of—"

Beitel cursed hotly. "You're full of merde."

"That's *enough*!" The captain heaved a harsh sigh, then said, in a more solicitous tone, "Look, Beitel,

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I'm as sorry about him as you are. I liked Pointer. I'll miss him. But there's no bringing him back. There's nothing that can be done for him now. I'm sorry, but that's how it is."

"The captain's right," said Perrin. "We all knew what the dangers were. We all knew—"

"We could've brought his body back."

"Beitel, there was no body left to bring back." The captain's voice was bleak. "The important thing, the *essential* thing, is that we've accomplished our mission. We have Butler now, and that's what really matters."

She lay among the dark angels and thought, Yes, you have Butler, and Butler has only the memory of her one original idea, her one brave notion. Butler, that most mediocre of human beings, has failed again. It should have been so easy to do. But I loved him, I loved him all his life, in spite of everything, and I could never have stolen him knowing how much losing him would hurt that other me. I am such a coward.

And then it should have been so easy just to die, but I looked into the mouth of oblivion, and my resolve crumbled, disintegrated. Intellectual resignation to death does not mean emotional readiness. The soul and the cells cry out for survival even when the mind knows that death is the only solution. I am such a coward.

"I could never have done it," she murmured.

The black-clad trio peered at her, and the captain said, "What?"

"I could never have gone through with it."

"Shut up," growled Beitel.

"What's she talking about?" said Perrin.

"I am such a coward."

"*Shut up,*" Beitel screeched, "*or I'll kill you, God damn it!*"

"*You* shut up," the captain said, stabbing a finger at Beitel.

"I could have changed the course of history," the captive went on. "Literally changed the course of history. I'm the person to do it. But I'm not the *kind* of person who could do it. I lost my nerve."

"Pointer lost his life."

"Beitel."

The woman on the ground looked at Beitel. "I'm sorry, I truly am sorry. Was he your lover?"

Beitel moaned and bared teeth behind his visor.

The captain shook her head at the captive. "Would you please not talk?"

"Can you make me not talk?"

"I will!" Beitel lurched to his feet. "I'll stomp your damn throat in!"

"No!" The captain rose and stood over the captive. "Another threatening move, Beitel, one more *sound,* damn it, and I'll kick your face through the back of your helmet. You understand me? Butler goes back alive and unharmed, or none of us dares go back at all."

Belt buckles beeped. "Ten seconds," Perrin said, "and then we can get the hell out of here."

The bound woman forced herself to a sitting position. "Will he be there when we get back?"

The three dark angels did not answer her. The captain and Perrin hauled her to her feet and supported her between themselves.

"All together now," the captain said, "activate!"

Shrill whines rose and fell and died away, and the Pleistocene sun peeked over the eastern edge of the world to find nothing that should not have been there.

THEY MATERIALIZED in the reception

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lock of the chrononautics terminal, June 18, A. D. 2266, and patiently stood there until the decontamination cycle had been completed. A man in a bright blue smock carefully removed the captive's harness, and then, without ceremony, the captain surrendered her prisoner to an officer of the Lord Reformer's personal guard.

THE ROOM was high and wide and well-lit. An irregular portion of one wall had been de-opaqued. It was raining outside, just as it had been an hour earlier, when she had stolen the chronopak and left the terminal. She sat in a high-backed chair, unable to move more than her head and fingers, and watched the rain fall. And waited for the Lord Reformer to make his pleasure known.

Presently, a door irised open in the wall facing the chair, and His Majesty the Lord Reformer of Earth Ernst Bishop Butler entered the room. The iris closed behind him as he strode forward to stand before her. For several seconds, they regarded each other in silence disturbed only by the hushed crackle of His Majesty's envelope of protective energy.

She said, "How well you look this morning, Ernst. Proud, self-assured. Like a man completely in charge of himself."

The Lord Reformer scowled. "You've—"

"A man who has bent the world to his will."

"Don't interrupt me a second time." He glared at her for a moment, then began pacing back and forth beside her chair. "This is all so unlike you. *Stealing* a chronopak. Unauthorized time travel. Resisting arrest. Treasonous offenses." He paused and aimed a long finger at her face. "Capital offenses." Punishable by death.

"What will become of me now?"

The Lord Reformer gestured helplessly. "I don't know. I don't know what to do with you. Have you lost your *mind*? Do you *want* to die?"

"No," she said. After a moment, she added, "I don't want to die, Ernst."

"Then why did you do these things? Why?"

"I . . ." She tried to shrug but failed. She settled for staring at the high gray ceiling. "I woke up one morning earlier this week, and it was as though I'd awakened from a trance. I could no longer ignore the fact that the world had gone a way I cannot abide. Something I cherish and love has . . . I thought to rectify matters. And to redeem myself, to atone for my part in making the world what it is today."

"You're not making any sense." His voice sounded lost, hurt, anguished. "Nothing you've done today makes any sense. Along with everything else, one man is dead, five very expensive machines are ruined, and I'm told the power drain at the terminal during the course of your little adventure was such that an indefinite suspension of the temporal research program will result."

The woman in the chair shut her eyes, shook her head wearily, yawned.

"Am I boring you?" demanded the Lord Reformer.

She dutifully opened her eyes. "I'm sorry, Ernst, but the past twenty or so hours have been exhausting ones. I'm very tired and. . . ."

She could not say the rest: depressed, disappointed, sick at heart, disgusted.

"You don't seem particularly concerned." His face was mottling with

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fury now. "Or is it that you don't realize the enormity of your crimes? Sutch and Berner have already drawn up your death warrant. They're demanding my seal on it. *Demanding!* Why do you think we try to be so careful about time travel? You could have caused serious trouble, introduced a cataclysmic paradox, who knows just *what* you could have done? Time is not a toy!"

"Time would have healed itself. I was trying to do a brave thing. I had a heroic plan."

"Brave? Heroic?" His Majesty spat the words. "Placing the very structure of the world in peril is a heroic plan?"

"I was *trying* to make a personal sacrifice in the hope that it would set the world a-right. I failed." She felt tears gathering under her eyelids. She blinked them away and forced herself to meet his gaze. "I failed not because I was appalled by the idea of altering history, not even because I love you too much, but because, at the crucial moment, I wasn't *willing* to make that sacrifice. I lacked the courage. I couldn't go through with my plan."

"What plan?" She flinched as a bead of his spittle struck her on the left cheek. She could not raise her hand to wipe it off. *"What plan?"*

"I . . . I was going to go back to when you were a baby. I was going to steal you and take you away to some day and age where you wouldn't have grown up to be what you are. Where you wouldn't have been able to do anyone any harm. I failed because I couldn't beat the thought of taking you from . . . from myself. Of the agony I'd be causing that other, younger me. I lost heart, and then I decided I only wanted to die. But I couldn't even manage that."

The Lord Reformer of Earth looked at her in stunned disbelief. Many seconds passed before he could speak again, and then his voice was barely more than a hoarse whisper. "You *are* mad."

"No, I'm only weak and a coward. If I were strong enough and brave enough to forget how much I love you, I'd try to. . . ."

Again, she could not say the rest: kill you.

"I'm the single most powerful person in history," he said. "I brought the world to its knees. How could you want to throw that away?"

"You've made the world an ugly, hateful place."

"I've given you everything you could possibly desire!"

"There is one thing you haven't given me, Ernst. Not in a long, long time."

He waited for her to go on, and when she remained silent, he bent toward her and said, very earnestly, "What? Tell me," and then, kneeling before the chair, "Please tell me what it is," and, finally, covering her hands with his, "Tell me what you *want* from me, I have to know, please," and he was starting to cry.

She shook her head. "I still love you too much. I didn't plan to hurt you, and I still don't want to. Don't force me to. I'm tired, I don't care what you do to me, just leave me alone."

He rose and slowly backed away from her, his face full of confusion and something else which she recognized from other days as terror. The iris opened, swallowed him, closed.

She sat looking through the de-opaqued portion of the wall, watching raindrops break against the invisible barrier, until a sob worked its way up her throat. I am such a coward, she thought. She quietly cried.

When she was finished, she saw

(cont. on page 123)

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"FANTASIA" VISIONS OF NON-REALITY

LOU STATHIS

COMMONLY, fantasy is thought to be a small area of activity in a dark and disreputable literary neighborhood, somewhere below and to the left of science fiction. Even people who read it, those who should know better, think of fantasy as a small and private place, identifiable by the presence of perhaps some cute elves, a wise old sage or two, or of course, a steel-swinging hyper-thyroid case with an IQ barely in the double digits. Personally, I've been bored by adorable dwarves since reading *The Hobbit* in fifth grade, and I've always found Conan much more to my liking on the page of a comic than I ever have in a book or magazine. But fantasy is, of course, much more than just an isolated genre defined by its two or three most identifiable symbols. In my vocabulary the word covers a vast amount of territory, as wide as all art, as deep as the human intelligence, and as old as the first homo-sapien thought that transcended the reality of the immediate world.

As Lin Carter has pointed out (in his 1973 Ballantine book, *Imaginary Worlds*, apparently the only book-length examination of fantasy ever published), fantasy and literature were, at the beginning, one and the same. It is only recently that the literature of realism has shouldered its way onto the center of the stage. An even more recent aberration is science fiction, which at its most essential level is little more than rationalized fantasy; fantasy made a little more believable through the insertion of information that serves to tie the story closer to our commonly agreed-upon reality. In the expansive definition that I choose to work from, fantasy is simply any visualization of the non-real. It may be something as small as one slight deviation of the fantasy world from the one that is thought to be ours, or it might be something as all-encompassing as a completely imaginary plane of existence. Fantasy is the artistic umbrella under which most of us work. It is an impulse that rises from the flash of an image in the mind's eye, the momentary hallucination of a day-dream or perhaps nothing more than a feeling in the gut, an indefinable sensation of estrangement from reality. It is a part of us that is child-like (*not* childish), innocent and inherently human (though perhaps not uniquely human). Whatever that instant of visualization might be, call it a contact with the unconscious, it is the Creative Moment of fantasy. How the artist interprets this dimensional window is what makes him a good, or less than good fantasist.

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I HOPE that opening statement hasn't set an unnecessarily heavy tone for this column, but I feel it is needed both as an introduction to the critical principles I'd like to work from, and as an elaborate rationalization of this column's discussion of things normally ignored in other science fiction and fantasy magazines. There's a great deal of fantasy-inspired work being done today that is worthy of examination, and as Ted has given me a completely free hand I hope to cover as much ground as I can. My interests range through music (especially the progressive rock that has been slowly leaking over from Europe for the past six or seven years), the visual arts (comics, films, television, etc.) and of course prose fiction (poetry however, puts me to sleep). This column is in no way intended to replace or compete with Fritz Leiber's *Fantasy Books* column (the thought of comparing my credentials to his horrifies me). Ideally, the columns should complement each other, enlivening the magazine by enlarging its field of view, and hopefully making FANTASTIC that much more enjoyable for you, the reader. Personally, I've always judged an sf magazine by the interest-factor of its features, and they are invariably the sections I read first.

IF YOU'VE BEEN paying any attention at all to the things going on around you (and I hope the readers of this magazine *do* pay attention—this column is based on that assumption), you might have noticed that there is an explosion of fantasy occurring in the arts. It is happening in our own isolated sphere as well as in the mass culture, where it has taken hold as it has at no time in the recent past. Look at paperback publishing, where more fantasy/science fiction will be issued this year than ever before. Del Rey, DAW, Ace, Dell and Pocket Books have all noticeably expanded their lines, and two new programs, Davis Publications' Dale Books (the *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* people) and Pinnacle's Futorian Science Fiction line (edited by Robert Silverberg) have just recently appeared. There is a great slickness and sophistication in the packaging of new fantasy/science fiction paperbacks (not to mention a healthy amount of cynicism and money-lusting exploitation), with the dominant style of the cover art leaning prominently in the direction of romantic representationalism. Certain publishers, especially Del Rey Books, seem to be embarking on a program of imprinting the book-buying public with a series of identifiable images that brand a book immediately in the buyer's mind (without a thought on his part) as fantasy or science fiction (Darrell Sweet's and the Hildebrandts' covers are two examples that spring to mind). This to me indicates a move into the mass market, into the rigidly controlled territory occupied today by historical romances, where a book must have a certain *look* (or worse, certain objects in the cover illustration) in order to identify it as part of a marketing category. That, of course, makes it easier for the sales people to hustle it, and booksellers to cubby-hole it. Cover art and other visual symbols have become very important as the urgent need to sell more copies, a disease that infects the mass market mind, is brought to bear. The value of the visual image is shown in the huge sales of fantasy art in poster, calendar and book form, and also the sudden preponderance of fantasy films. A fantasy film is the number one grossing picture of all time, and a

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fantasy book is well on its way to accomplishing the same feat in hardcover publishing. It's *everywhere*.

Why has this explosion happened? Certainly it hasn't been without causes, and I've heard a few ideas, and have some of my own, that invite speculation. Some of it I'm sure, has to do with the social and economic conditions in the United States and the world today. We know from the past that a depressed time sends people searching for an escape, and the early seventies with its Nixonian smog-cloud certainly served that purpose. In addition, the tangible feeling of optimism and change that is in the air has once again turned people's thoughts upward and outward (a good time to revive the space program, perhaps?). People, I think, are less afraid of technology and more comfortable with what it has done for their lives. Television screen computer games and the advent of such things as home computers, video recorders and primitive household robots have lessened the Future-Shock rejection that has been the normal human reaction to change and new technology. Now that it has been reduced to a much more understandable and personally rewarding level, people don't automatically equate machines and computers with cold inhumanity—a tangle of wire and metal that is silently moving to steal your job, screw up your utility bill, or perhaps take over the world.

As to the public's acceptance of non-specific fantasy creations (as opposed to the specific images of computers and spaceships), I think that the drug culture of the sixties can be held partially responsible. It began with the public's early acceptance of art-forms that were essentially drug influenced, like Psychedelic Art (Peter Max), Rock Music (which from a small part of the recording business has grown to become the major portion of all records produced, and its more commercially successful practitioners have become mass-culture media stars), and hallucinatory visual effects (how many TV commercials and station ID's have used ideas nicked from *2001*?). Drug culture influence has seeped into the most mundane aspects of our lives, changing such things as hairstyles, clothing and even the vernacular of our language. This is surely proof of a pervasive social change, a change so intense that it is still being felt more than halfway into the following decade. The minds most affected by this change are naturally the ones that matured in the midst of it, and those minds are now of an age that they are assembling the menu of mass consumption.

The imaginative style of the times were set by such striking visions of non-reality as flashy sf paperback covers (especially those of Richard Powers and, with a much different approach, Ed Emshwiller), Tolkein's fantasy world, the Marvel Comics of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, Steranko and Gene Colan, television shows like *The Man From Uncle*, *The Prisoner* and *Star Trek*, and Rock music that, beginning with Pink Floyd, Yes and King Crimson, increasingly turned to fantasy for musical and lyric inspiration. These works, and others from the time, all contain a central, transcendant vision of aural, visual and existential non-reality. With the widespread use of mind-twisting drugs, the notion of an impermenant subjective reality acquired the legitimacy of personal experience. Drugs provide the user with an artificial estrangement from reality, and the artists of

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this generation have tried to translate this new perspective on their perceptions into art. It is this heightened awareness, the "strength to dream" Colin Wilson called it in a somewhat different context, that the artists working today have tried to translate into the terminology of the mass culture.

This of course, isn't the first time artists have used the language of fantasy in the mass media, but today with the awesome network of media technology penetrating as it does into the deepest level of billions of human lives, the power of the fantasy image has shown its might. I've always thought that the material of fantasy and science fiction made for deeply moving imagery, a sort of stirring in the soul or provocation of the intellect at almost subliminal levels. Resonance, I believe it is called. And as I see all around me the exploitation of this power, I think these feelings are confirmed. Now that the time and also the mood of the mass-mind seems favorable, less resistant to suggestion, the fantasy iconography is slipping its way in. It triggers something basic in the subconscious, and the popular arts are only beginning to test the depths to which this trigger extends. Advertising—packaging and merchandising of products—seems to once again be the first to notice the effectiveness of a new response-producing device.

Confirmation of this idea is offered by the contents of a recently published book: *The Album Cover Album*, edited by Roger Dean and Storm Thorgerson, published in the UK by Dragon's World Ltd., and in the USA by A & W Visual Library at $10.95. The editors (about whom more will be said later in this column) have assembled hundreds of examples of record-album cover art grouped in a loose and unusually fresh, visual free-association manner. The book is a joy to behold: beautifully printed, fully annotated, and complemented by a lucid text tracing the historical development of record jacket design. Worthy of note, however, is how solidly the covers using fantasy images emerge as the most visually interesting in the group. They are compelling in a way that cannot be approached by something merely chromatically or perspectivally arresting.

It is natural that record company people would turn to fantasy artists with proven track records in the art of attracting attention in order to provide visual excitement for their products. It's also natural that Frazetta would be one of the first they turned to: the cover to a years-old album by the now defunct Dust featured the Frazetta painting you might remember from the Lancer (and now Ace) *Conan Of Cimmeria* (two red-haired snow giants slashing their battle-axes at a sword-bearing warrior, for those of you with faulty memories). More recently the British rock band Nazareth used the painting called "The Brain" (in the first Bantam/Peacock book) as the cover to their album *Expect No Mercy*. The selection of Frazetta is an excellent one, as his work rarely fails to rivet the viewer and stir his interest. Other crossovers from book-cover illustrating have been Kelly Freas (reworking his famous October 1953 *Astounding* "Fix It!" cover for *News Of The World* by Queen), Ken Kelly (who began life as a Frazetta Xerox machine, and has now painted the covers for the last two albums by Kiss, an awful rock band whose whole success rides on audience response to fantasy images), The Brothers Hildebrandt (who grace

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the cover of the *Citadel* album by a Yes-influenced American rock band, Starcastle), British artist Chris Foss (whose delicately air-brushed and hyper-real space-craft appeared on the cover of the Ian Gillian Band's first album), and astronomical landscape painter Don Davis, who is said to be working on the next Jefferson Starship album.

Two recent covers by an unfamiliar Japanese artist, Nagaoka, have caught my eye. The first was a particularly striking pair of heavily airbrushed dancing robots, shooting beams of light from the bottoms of their feet. The picture forcefully grabbed for my attention from the disco section, an area I normally skirt with a sneer. More recently he's drawn a double sleeve for the Electric Light Orchestra's *Out Of The Blue*. It is a snazzy disc-shaped space station admitting a small shuttle rocket into its hold, with huge turntables visible through the viewports. Open the jacket and you will see a tightly rendered, well-detailed depiction of the station's control room. The cover is both beautiful to look at (though I think someone like Mike Hinge could've done a better job—and indeed has), and importantly, an effective magnet for the eyes that plants a powerful and majestic image into your subconscious.

It pleases me to see this convergence of my two main interests, fantasy and rock music, because I have always perceived a similarity of appeal in these two popular art forms, as well as a similarity of position in regards to the rest of their associated forms. Both satisfy a basic need strongly tied to the current times, and both are looked down upon by both producers and consumers of other related art forms. I welcome the appearance of good fantasy art on record jackets, but I don't welcome the inappropriate use of fantasy imagery as an attention getting device for something quite different in content. Stomping robots certainly lend themselves to the mechanistic mindlessness of disco, and Kiss look not at all uncomfortable in a heroic Conan-like setting, and perhaps ELO's sound is as grandiose as the huge space station suggests, but somehow I just can't shake the notion that an extraordinary piece of art should indicate a unique music inside. Perhaps I'm thinking too literally, but I see an old problem rearing its ugly head again: someone has borrowed our language without really paying attention to its correct usage. The package has nothing to do with the contents. To me that is like wrapping garbage in gift paper and leaving it where someone might steal it.

ROGER DEAN'S work for the Yes group, however, has been satisfying to me both as fantasy art of the highest quality (Dean was chosen as the Best Artist by last year's World Fantasy Convention, so evidently others agree with me on that), as well as creations perfectly harmonious with the style, content and tone of Yes' music. Essentially, Dean has set the visual style of the band: he has (with his artist brother, Martyn) designed stage settings that the band has taken on tour, he created the Yes logo that has become the identifying symbol of the band, he also has designed badges, booklets (one of which came with the *Fragile* album, the band's fourth and the first to feature Dean's work), record labels for at least two of the albums and, of course, he has painted the covers on six of Yes' lps. The covers appear to be scrupulous

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translations of the music's aural narratives, but it is made clear in Dean's 1975 book *Views* (published by Dean's own Dragon's Dream Books at $9.95, distributed by Big 'O' Publishing) that the consistence of vision shown in the work runs through just about everything Dean has done. It is as though Dean is designing his own fantasy world piece by piece, from the humanoids who inhabit it, to the technology they've developed to control it, to the creatures that share it with them, down to the trees and other vegetation that cover it. His Yes album covers were intersection points between his world and the band's.

Views is beautifully laid-out and printed, the paper is of an exceptional quality and the binding is both glued and stitched (rare these days). It is a chronological collection of Dean's work from his earliest designs of landscape furniture made while he was at art school, through the dozens of record jackets he's done, to his recent designs for shell-like housing, which seems to be his most consuming interest these days. Dean, by his own admission, is a designer (or visualiser) first and an illustrator second. He draws only to represent his designs, and finds himself frustrated with the limitations of the medium. He has tried other ways of realizing his ideas—model-building in particular—but drawing seems to be the most satisfying to him. He states in the book that he wishes his technique to be invisible, so the idea of his pictures as artwork recedes in the viewer's mind giving precedence to the designs and/or ideas contained in it. I think he succeeds at this, in some cases probably more so than he would wish, because some of his illustrations lack a visual focus (the *Badger* album cover) and suffer from poor composition. But Dean's work is always stimulating and thought-provoking. He puts a great deal of imagination into his work, more than I think many science fiction/fantasy illustrators working within the field do. A particular case is the sequence of five illustrations that appear on two Yes album jackets. The cover for *Fragile* shows an exploding miniature world, with a bird-winged spaceship looking on from above. The sequence is continued two albums later with the *Yessongs* cover, as these planetary fragments, slightly curved pieces of the surface with cone-shaped roots, float across space on their points, preceeded by the spacecraft. In the next panel (the album is a triple sleeve) the fragments splash into the ocean of a planet's surface and stand poised gracefully over the water. They then sprout animal and vegetable life, and in the fifth and final panel, a city appears. An entire epic fantasy in five panels.

Dean's work often shows a blending of the natural and the mechanistic: things that are built, like cities, resemble rock formations or crystal structures, while organic objects, such as the mount of a charging warrior, have mechanical parts. Both his creatures and his technologies test the line that separates the natural and the synthetic. He has drawn insect flying machines, bat-like flying machines, elephants with insect wings, an elephant with a tank head, a delta-winged jet with a seagull skull cockpit, and futuristic warriors mounted on charging dragons. The designs follow nature's lead, with echoes of mushroom shapes, shells, coral formations, sponges, trees, caves, rocks, and waterfalls. The objects are sleek and flowing, with bright, beautifully-blended colors and

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swirling, marble-ized backgrounds. I admire Dean's work a great deal, both as pure idea, and as bright, interesting things to look at. There are over a dozen posters of his work (available in record stores or gift shops), and all of them add visual interest to a room.

STORM THORGERSON, Dean's co-editor on *The Album Cover Album*, is also a part of the Hipgnosis studio, along with Aubrey Powell and Peter Christopherson. Over the past ten years Hipgnosis' album jackets, usually photographic, have projected a wide range of surreal imagery and dead-panned absurdity. Powell and Thorgerson were both film students back in 1968 when a group of their friends, Pink Floyd, asked them to design an album cover. The album was *A Saucerful Of Secrets*, an important landmark in progressive rock (the first album by Pink Floyd as they exist today), and the beginning of a long association between the band and Hipgnosis (as they decided to name themselves after more work began to come in). Though Hipnosis haven't quite orchestrated Pink Floyd's visual style in Dean's manner with Yes, their jackets have definitely helped formulate the band's detached, cooly intellectual image. Some of the jackets they've done have been patterns of colors (*Meddle* and *Obscured by Clouds*) that remind one of *Saucerful*, one was a striking graphic design (the prism and spectrum of *Dark Side Of The Moon*), but most of them, and most of Hipgnosis' most interesting work for other bands, have been photographs of absurdly juxtapositioned objects, normal-appearing people doing odd things, or other, more subtly altered realities.

I think it is important to note that Thorgerson and Powell have backgrounds in film and philosophy, with design training conspicuously absent. No boring pictures of the band-members for these guys. Here there is knowledge that the eye of the buyer is attracted by the questions implied by the photograph. It almost seems sometimes that the photos are frames from a film wrenched out of context, suggesting ever-so-subtly both antecedent and ensuing narrative. The three panels of 10cc's *How Dare You* suggest this. The double-panelled inner fold shows a room-full of fashionably dressed people, apparently at a party, all talking on the phone. The two outer pictures are of two ends of strange phone conversations, one a seedily dressed old man muttering obscenely into a phone while at the other end an airline stewardess listens, mortified; the other side features a tightassed businessman giving his sleazy-looking mistress her walking papers. There is no question, given the bland self-assurance of the photographs, that what might seem meaningless to you at the moment, makes perfect sense in some unspecified context. What exactly that context might be is left for the viewer to speculate upon, and with the strange objects spread throughout the photographs and the furtive activity in the background, that speculation can be most interesting.

Even more mystifying are the four photos on the Pink Floyd *Wish You Were Here* lp. The front picture (like all the others on the jacket, surrounded by a thick white border) shows two men in suits, shaking hands dispassionately, while the one on the right is consumed by flames. One also notices that the upper right hand corner of the photo itself has caught fire. On the back is a man in a dark suit and derby hat, his facial fea-

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tures airbrushed out, and open space bewteen the bottoms of his pants and tops of his shoes, as well as between the cuffs of his shirtsleeves and the ends of his white gloves. The man is standing on a sand dune with one foot resting on an attache case displaying past and present Pink Floyd stickers (all designed by Hipgnosis, and included with previous albums), and in his right hand he is holding a clear vinyl copy of a record with the *Wish You Were Here* label on it (two robot hands shaking). Below the picture, the viewer sees the white border cracking a bit and some sand pouring through. On one side of the inner sleeve there is a photo of a body sticking up out of a pool of water from the waist down, as though diving into a lake without making a splash. With the reflection, the body looks like two pairs of legs joined at the waist. Again, in the lower left hand corner of the white border there is a hole, and water is streaming through it. On the other side we see a red, translucent scarf-like piece of material floating through the air betwen a row of tall trees. Here the ends of the photograph are wavy against the border, as though it like the scarf, is being buffeted by the wind. Obviously we have the four elements: Fire, Earth, Water and Air respectively, breaking through from the reality of the photographs into the reality of the viewer. Needless to say, a picture postcard with the diving figure is included with the album. Wish you were here, indeed.

Other strikingly surreal Hipgnosis covers have included a human figure with a huge toe sitting where its head should be *(Toe Fat)*, huge red-smeared lips held shut with a zipper (Capability Brown's *Voice*, a rolling sea of sand dunes crossed from the foreground all the way to the distant horizon by a single line of red spheres (the Nice's *Elegy*), winged reptiles flying about in the canyon between two glass-walled skyscrapers *(Quatermass)*, and a red-tinted montage comprised of a huge tulip, a roadway leading into the center distance, a negative-printed child holding out its lens-distorted hand, and a glass-walled structure that appears to be a modern office building (*Parachute* by the Pretty Things). My personal favorite, and probably because it is the most intriguingly science fictional of the bunch, appears on *Prologue* by Renaissance. It is a large body of water over which a series of varying-sized thin rectangles are gathering, forming step-like towers. Some have small figures standing on them as though they were the decks of huge ships, and some have green spheres that are twice as tall as the figures. All have windows on their sides. In the background you can see a line of five bird-like creatures swooping toward one of the structure-stacks, and behind on the shore, a couple of large pyramidal structures, one of which is lit from the inside. Cities? And over to the left is a single one of the flat objects floating in the air. The fantasy images and reality statements both stated and implied in this picture evoke a universe of ideas. Another window into non-reality has been breached.

PATRICK WOODROFFE is another young British artist who has done some amount of work on rock album covers. Recently Dragon's World in Britain published a book of Woodroffe's paintings, etchings, book covers and record jackets called *Mythopoeikon* that was picked up and published by Fireside/Simon &

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Schuster in the USA at $9.95. Again the book design (by the artist) is exceptional, and the quality of the package luxuriant. The book is 156 pages long, and it begins with early pen and ink drawings of a distinctly decadent, surrealist bent. The author's commentary takes us, with candor and good humor, through his trials as a teacher and student, through his progress experimenting with various media (etchings, "three-dimensional projects" and a huge, Bosch-influenced trip-tych), up to 1972 when he decides to give up teaching. At this point he gets his first book cover assignment, and over the next eighty-odd pages we are shown his four years accumulated work for sf and mystery paperbacks. Woodroffe has a lush, crowded style. The colors are bright, sometimes gaudily so and therefore unnerving, compounded by the the tremendous amount of activity to be taken in by the viewer's eye. On paperbacks I find much of Woodroffe's work unpleasant, but reproduced here on slick paper, some the full 8½′ by 12″ size of the page, I found myself liking them much more. A picture that appears crowded and confused on a book jacket may be much less offputting when presented in a large size, well printed and as a piece of art, not a book cover. Here I can appreciate all the lushness, the color, the profusion of detail, the thickness of lines, the *ripeness* that overwhelms much of what Woodroffe does, and admire his technique and depth of vision. Woodroffe diverts attention from his weaknesses much less effectively than does Roger Dean. His hardware has an unsolid, toy-like quality to it, and his figures are anatomically distorted and stiffly posed. He is best at luridly colored, fantasy grotesques or horror illustrations with vivid, mind-riveting images. He carries a heavy influence of Jungian myth symbols, especially those of evil, death, sexual depravity and physical decay. Fairy tales, Lewis Carrol references, and the great decadents of art and literature are also present.

Individual paintings of note include a repulsive octopus used on the British paperback of A. Merrit's *The Dwellers In The Mirage* (which bears a striking resemblance to Roger Dean's cover for the Gentle Giant's *Octopus* album). A cover painted for Hammett's *Red Harvest* that was rejected (the artist admits its inappropriately surreal treatment) shows a skeleton in a baggy, 30's-cut suit spreading droplets of blood in a field where they sprout as plants. The second painting the artist did depicted a ring of trench-coated gangsters machine-gunning each other in the back and falling over like a line of dominoes, the big round dots on their backs exploding from/into bullet wounds. Another cover showed a skull-headed policeman pointing his still-smoking revolver at the reader (*Line Of Duty* by Ernest Tidyman). His painting for a Future (UK) anthology called *The Graveyard* details a marvelously chilling cemetery—humped ground, grave stones askew, gnarled leafless trees, and an abscuring green mist—in which an evil-looking snake has burst from the ground before a grave-stone in the immediate foreground. Woodroffe has also done nightmarish blue-skinned warriors, fish-headed humans, numerous representations of the Horned One, and a record cover for a band called Budgie of mounted, parakeet-headed warriors (interestingly, used by Roger Dean when he painted the group's next album cover). Woodroffe perhaps overloads his

(cont. on page 130)

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)
the qualities of jazz musicians, who learn from all genres and respect them for what they are—not what someone wishes them to be.

—RICHARD KRUEGER

Okay—let's forget *Star Wars* for the moment, and talk about something far more basic: the Brain vs. the Body. Or, as reader Krueger put it, "The appeal is to the gut, not the head, and if you can't disconnect one from the other at times, I feel sorry for you."

We can *all* "disconnect one from the other at times"—but an important question is, Should we? And if so, how often?

It's a fallacy that critics somehow respond to the materials they review—a book, a live or recorded performance—in a way basically different from the way an "average" audience would. The plain and simple fact is that we all respond to most things first on a "gut" or instinctive level—we enjoy, or we don't enjoy. What a critic does thereafter is to look within himself at his responses—he introspects—and then figure out what causes those responses. He will then praise or blame the work for those aspects of it which caused him either to like or dislike it.

In other words, the "head" comes into it only after the fact, to explain the "gut's" reaction. (Now it is also true that a critic, being exposed to more works than the average member of the audience, may identify the root causes of his responses more quickly—to the point where it appears to be a "head" reaction. But this is the product of experience and training, nothing more.)

When I saw *Star Wars* the first time it was at a critics' screening under nearly ideal circumstances (good seats, excellent viewing position, comfortable air-conditioning, etc.). The second time I saw it was when I took my seven-year-old daughter to see it, in a local theatre amid a typical audience. The second viewing confirmed my impressions from the first viewing, neither adding to nor subtracting from them.

What I saw on each occasion was a movie in which the eye was dazzled and the brain insulted—repeatedly. Krueger quotes the reason: "Look, it's five million years ago and in another part of the universe. We can do anything we want." In the December, 1977 issue of this magazine I quoted Michael Rogers from his *Rolling Stone* column to the same effect: "In short, for writers, science fiction is cheating—the easy way out . . . ."

So Lucas "cheated". Some of the ways he "cheated" would matter only to someone better informed than he—the matter of the misuse of "parsecs," for example—and in other ways, like the sound effects in space, his "cheating" was seen (by him) to be in the cause of a good effect. But the most profound way he "cheated" was to undercut the basic believability of his characters and their situation, reducing them and their problems to simplistic cartoons, and their solutions to sheer dumb luck.

I'm sorry, but both my brain and my body agree on this one: we don't like "cheats". My gut reaction was that *Star Wars* was flimsy, a fancy false front with little substance behind it. And my gut was angry about that. "Why," my gut said to me, "didn't they make the characters more solid and the story less prone to coincidence? It wouldn't have cost them another dime!"

It would appear that reader Krueger and I agree, up to this point.

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Where we part company—where I part company, obviously, with a lot of people—is on the question of how important this "cheating" really is in terms of one's enjoyment of the work. Krueger says we should "detach brain from emotion—something SF writers seem terrified of doing . . . ." And I say that this is really not the point—that my "brain" didn't rule over my emotion; it simply explained my emotional reaction after the fact. In my case at least the "cheating" hurt my enjoyment of the movie. I know I'm not unique in this fact—merely in a small minority.

Why didn't the "cheating" bother Krueger? I have to accept his explanation: he turned his "brain" off; disengaged his rational mind from what he was experiencing. This way he didn't have to remember anything from one part of the movie to the next and could enjoy everything which occurred.

He correctly points out that the same ability is needed to enjoy "a typical American hard rock band, or even one of the shorter Conan stories." (I'll ignore that last dig, confident that at least one among you will wish to respond to it.) As a rock critic and deejay I've had to listen to a lot of "typical American hard rock" and unless you can forget that you've heard every single note, line or riff many times before in identical arrangements, the stuff is pretty boring.

But what does this say about the ideal audience?

For maximum enjoyment of mass entermainment, one should shut down one's ability to think.

Is this really such a swell idea?

We are entering our last year of the Seventies; a few generalizations can be offered. One is that in the sixties the "in" drugs were marijuana, amphetimines and LSD—mind-exciters. And in the seventies the "in" drugs have been alcohol, heroin, and soporifics—mind/body numbing drugs. This choice has echoed a shift in political emphasis, away from activism towards leave-me-alone-ism, and has accompanied a withering of the popular arts, which are safely commercial today in contrast to the exciting growth and experimentalism of the sixties.

The entertainment industry has been consolidating to an increasing extent, and as small-man shops have been absorbed into corporate conglomerates the thinking has also changed. The ideal to the accountants and lawyers who now manage the entertainment industry would be an easily producable product which was absorbed eagerly by the public. It would help enormously if the public exercised a minimum amount of taste and accepted this product unquestioningly.

Television has had an hypnotic effect upon the population, training many to accept its offerings unhesitatingly and without imposing upon them any standards beyond those television bestows upon itself. Such an audience is passive and easily manipulated. A political leader can go on television and tell lies and many will believe him even if his lies are obvious ones (Nixon was a classic example).

An audience trained by television has, for the most part, achieved Richard Krueger's objective: such an audience does not think about what it is viewing; it simply accepts the sensations for the moment. As long as there *are* sensations coming along regularly, this audience is satisfied. (That was *Laugh-In's* secret.)

Do I want to join this audience?

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No. It repells me. The notion of *mindless enjoyment* is about as abhorant to me as its reverse would be—and once was.

For it is definitely not true that stf authors are "terrified" of detaching "brain from emotion." Indeed, the reverse is true: for far too long most stf authors wrote stories from their brains instead of their emotions: the ideas ruled and characters were thinner than cardboard.

Until the last ten or fifteen years only a very few authors—names like Sturgeon, leap to mind—seemed able or willing to integrate brain and emotion in their stories. Those authors towered above the others; their stories are, for the most part, the ones still remembered fondly today.

It's the *integration* of the Brain and the Body that we're going for.

Under the circumstances it's hard to view George Lucas's efforts as anything other than retrogressive—and reader Krueger's suggestion as counter-productive to the basic human experience.

Am I then saying, in effect, "You're a bunch of unthinking schleps if you liked that movie"?

And, *are you*?

MEA CULPA: A few issues back I proudly announced that we had returned to a bimonthly schedule. Since then each issue of this magazine and its companion publication, AMAZING SF, has continued to be dated and issued on a quarterly basis. I was wrong. My apologies.

From Rosemary Pardoe, Vice-President of the British Fantasy Society, comes news that Marvin Kaye's "The Flight of the Umbrella" (from our June, 1977 issue) and Parke Godwin's "The Lady of Finnigan's Hearth" (Sept., 1977) were given second and third place respectively in the short story section of the British Fantasy Awards, announced at the Society's Fantasycon in February 1978. My congratulations to Kaye and Godwin; it was a pleasure to publish their stories here.

Parke and Marvin have just (as I write this) published their fat (nearly 400 pages) novel, *The Masters of Solitude* (Doubleday), and the book is already causing a stir. Next issue Parke will headline FANTASTIC with a new novella, "Something Silent." I'm sure you won't want to miss it.

—TED WHITE

The Mouse Ran Up the Clock (cont. from page 110)

that the rain had stopped. Beyond the wall, under a low gray sky, was the world which Ernst Bishop Butler had bent to his will. She closed her eyes to it and thought about the one thing which the Lord Reformer of Earth had not given her, *a reason, Ernst, my beloved, my precious, to go on being glad you came out of my womb,* and, at length, alone in the room, she dared to say the thing aloud.

—STEVEN UTLEY

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046*

Dear Ted,

It's a sure sign of a floundering argument when you have to put words in your opponent's mouth. You probably read the words correctly but you sure didn't take time to understand the simple concepts they symbolize. Instead you pulled a propagandist's trick and decided they would say just what you wanted them to say. I did not, in anyway, shape or form, say that entertainment was divorced from characterization, exposition, or accuracy. Those are your words, not mine. What I did say was that a movie did not *have* to be relevant to be good. And I did say that corny, illogical, and inaccurate movie *could* be entertaining. This is not to say that corn, illogic, and inaccuracy are essential to entertainment. Quite the contrary. They are, however, essential to that escapist branch of entertainment of which *Star Wars* is a part. The verbal slap that you took at me because you couldn't understand a few simple words is truly laughable. Come on Ted, you make your living with words.

What is even more laughable is the way in which you keep calling George Lucas a liar. Mr. Lucas contends that *Star Wars* is nothing more than fantasy and you cry, "Oh, no! He's telling a big lie. It's not a fantasy, it's just bad science-fiction." Well, tell me Mr. White—what is this accusation based on? About the only reason you've given us so far is that the general public thinks it's science fiction. Does what the public thinks make what George Lucas says a lie? I can't see how. The movie fits all the "rules" that have been established concerning what is fantasy and what is not, and yet you still maintain that it's just bad science fiction. That's like saying *The Maltese Falcon* is a bad love story.

Okay, maybe I'm wrong. Despite all I've read about the *Star Wars* novel, in more respected journals than your own, it *is* possible that George Lucas did not write the book. I mean, after all, you do have all that inside information. Still, if I'm going to go around deflating poor, deprived *Star Wars* freaks by telling them that the "saviour" did *not* write the *Star Wars* novel in six days while resting on the seventh, I'm going to need some more detailed information. Give me a quote or something proving that George Lucas is in fact the liar you claim, and did not write the novelization. Of course, if you can't come up

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with such proof you can always claim the fifth amendment. On the other hand, if you can find such information, try to relate it correctly. I would hate to see a rerun of the thrashing Harlan Ellison gave you a couple of years ago.

Finaly, the fact that *Star Wars* is a bastardization of *Lord of the Rings* is blank ammunition in the assault that is being made on the movie. I know that you have not raised this as a criticism Ted, but before you or anyone else makes further note of it, let me remind you that there is nothing new under the sun. You've created bastards yourself, Ted. *Doc Phoenix* is just a poor man's *Doc Savage*, and hardly in keeping with the high standards you so zealously wave. Why did you write it anyway? Was it for the money? If so I guess that makes you a kind of literary whore and a hypocrit besides.

PERRY WILLIS
7139 Grand Valley
San Antonio, Texas 78242

Look, Perry, I'm willing to print your letter here. I'm willing to try to conduct a rational discourse with you. But I'm not going to trade insults with you, which seems to be what you have in mind. The statement I made which seems to have upset you so much was this: "If I read your argument correctly, entertainment has nothing to do with logical exposition or characterization or accuracy of detail." All you needed to say was, "You didn't *read my argument correctly." In fact, I believe I did, since you reiterate the same point this time. As for putting words in someone's mouth, you have done this more than once here in your letter. At no point have I called George Lucas a liar, and for you to insist that I have is clearly a case of your putting words in my mouth. I'm not going to argue the semantics of the label placed on* Star Wars; *the movie is perceived as "sci-fi" by movie-makers, the mass media and the audience. You can call it a spy story, a heroic fantasy, or anything else you chose. In fact it's space-opera, a genre thoroughly exploited by a publication called* Planet Stories *thirty years ago, and (blush!) by this magazine some twenty to twenty-five years ago. As for the authorship of the book, I don't know anyone within the science fiction publishing field who thinks Lucas wrote it. On the other hand, I don't have any hard facts about who* did *write it—just the rumors and scuttlebutt that make their way around a small, close-knit field like this one. (I don't know anyone who thinks Harlan "thrashed" me, either. Where did you come up with that one?) Finally, let me note that it's a sure sign of a floundering argument when someone raises a point to attack which hadn't previously been introduced—a straw man gambit. When you do so only in order to take another potshot at poor old Doc Phoenix—who has had to take his lumps from Marv Wolfman already—I must protest. For your information, I wrote one Doc Phoenix story of 8,000 words, specifically on commission to create a "Doc Savage-like character in modern dress," because as a kid I loved Doc Savage and wanted the opportunity to pay him a modest tribute. If that makes me "a kind of literary whore and a hypocrit* (sic)" *in your book, I guess I can live with it.* —TW

Dear Sir:

Two days ago, I received the July 1978 issue of FANTASTIC, the first issue of my subscription. Just shortly before I returned home to find it in

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the mailbox, I had seen it on the newsstands and magazine racks in my area. I prefer to get my magazines through the mail because they usually get to me faster that way (sometimes they are cheaper, also). Other magazines sometimes arrive weeks after they appear on the newsstands (notably *Galaxy*). I hope this pattern set with the first issue continues.

From the cover painting and the drawing, I guessed the point of "The Journal of Nathaniel Worth" before I began to read the story. Nevertheless, I loved the story. Sometimes I'm not that impressed by Robert F. Young's stories, but sometimes I am, and this one impressed me greatly. By far it was the best story in the issue.

I didn't like "The Lady of Finnegan's Hearth", and I didn't like "The Last Rainbow". But this issue's story by Parke Godwin was certainly better. Maybe the next one.

"The Treasure of Odirex" seemed, to me, a bad story. But I like everything else that Charles Sheffield wrote. I guess he writes better science fiction than fantasy. But I still look forward to seeing more of his work.

Sherwood Springer's short story didn't impress me. The ending was rather reminiscent on one of H.P. Lovecraft's stories (no need to tell you which one).

"Prowl" by Barry N. Malzberg surprised me—I actually liked it. This short story is the only one I've ever seen by him that I thought was really good. It was a bit too compressed, though. I must reexamine some of his other fiction.

"David's Friend, the Hole" was another good story from Grania Davis. Keep buying her stories.

Jack C. Haldeman II's story with the long title seemed a bit plotless to me. Sometimes he has a good story, sometimes he doesn't. That's the way it goes.

David R. Bunch's story was another lousy story, but I don't have anything to say about it.

When I first turned to the editorial page when I saw FANTASTIC on the newsstand, I got a pleasent surprise. Congratulations on returning to bimonthly publication! But it is a shame that you won't be able to publish Thomas Burnett Swann's novel. And the other half of your editorial didn't tell me anything new, but was still interesting.

Fritz Leiber's return was an excellent termination of his absence. Ever since I first bought FANTASTIC, his reviews have often been the high point of the issue. I hope that *Fantasy Books* returns as a regular feature.

However, I did like *The Sword of Shannara*. And your magazine is only the second one with a review of any depth of the book.

I missed your issue on *Star Treck* all those years ago. But this issue with *Star Wars* is interesting. The 'Novelization' is poorly written, though, so maybe George Lucas did write it. Alan Dean Foster wrote the newest *Star Wars* novel. (It just made the Paperback Best Seller List of the New York Times Book Review.) So if anybody besides George Lucas wrote the original novel, Alan Dean Foster is a likely choice. If he wrote the screenplay, though, that qualifies him to put his name on the novel. (George Lucas, that is).

The change in your cover, back to a painting in a box, is an improvement over the other format. That way, the type doesn't obscure the painting. And this is the fifth painting in a row by Stephen Fabian on the cover. The ninth in a row, if you count AMAZING.

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The interior artwork was good, though three stories had none. And the two artists whose names were unfamiliar to me were also good.

Overall, this issue was a pretty good issue. If you can keep up this level with a bi-monthly schedule, your magazines will be as good as they always have been. Maybe FANTASTIC will make it to its thirtieth year, after all.

ROBERT NOWALL
6 Martin Road
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Although the timing is variable, subscribers' copies usually arrive a week or two before an issue goes on sale on the stands.—TW

Dear Mr. White,

I seldom find myself in the frame of mind necessary to write a letter to a professional publication, but I am obviously moved to do so now. The October issue of FANTASTIC distresses me to the degree that I must attempt to communicate with you.

Let me preface, briefly I hope, that I've been a steady reader of AMAZING and FANTASTIC for quite a number of years and have read widely in fantasy and sf prior to and since I discovered them. The problems I am pointing to are not necessarily those of a novice to the broad fantasy spectrum.

First, the pluses of the October issue. The Kaye story was a pleasant fable that brought back the warmth of my personal experiences with N.Y. State Unemployment Service.

The Gardner story was executed in a competent manner, though a mite thin on character development. The characters *do* show a great growth potential, as the good ones often do, and I would not be surprised to see them in an expanded work somewhere. I would welcome it indeed.

The entry from Janet Fox far above the average quality of stories I've read from any source, recently. I read it the last of any of the stories in the issue and it almost dissuaded me from writing this letter.

But not quite enough. We now come to "The Hairy Parents". The style was everything it needed to be, it told the story without intruding on it. But, the climax was telegraphed in a painfully obvious manner at the halfway point. Some cutting of intermediate paragraphs might have helped here. There is also a problem with the number of fantasy/sf concepts thrown in here: racial memory, species extinction, telepathy, *and* time-stream alteration seem too convoluted a recipe for one meal.

"Death Eternal" carried all the trappings of a death-oriented narrative and, for me, none of the feeling. The characters did not really seem to react to the sheer awesomeness of the prospect of eternal life as people from the modern american era probably would. But perhaps I'm not normal in that sense; what would *you* do? The same? Think about it.

"Leasehold" was interesting in concept, but suffered badly from very sketchy background development to the point that it seemed rushed and two-dimensional. Perhaps you should have dumped the next two and given Mr. West more room to work in.

The noisome scribbling by Bunch and Shirley was not worthy of the former stature of your magazine. The first is nothing more than semi-literate self-indulgence with cute attempts at being mystically poetic. As for the latter, I would not have been surprised at stepping in it on a sidewalk, but I would not be overjoyed. To find it between the pages of something I was holding in my hands

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was appalling, at best. I mean, I handle food with my hands!

I am not being picky and I do not enjoy cutting down the works of those who are far more ambitious than I. I merely ask for stories with plots and characters and a beginning and a middle and an end, not even necessarily in that order.

The Davis piece was depressing and a pretty typical post-holocaust story. Except that it wasn't much a *story* either, because the only statement the character could make was "Gee, I've survived this far . . . . .". We who read the field at all have been exposed to plenty of these vignettes. We are quite aware of the potential ugliness. But offer us alternatives and solutions, not breast- beating and helpless self-pity. This is a literature of imagination, not defeatism.

The piece by P.J. Andrews cute and quite boring and, I suspect, pointless.

And to the Malzburg and Pronzini, I can only point to and say "poor judgement" on your part, Ted. It strikes me that this little beast may have been included only because "Malzburg" is a well-known name in the field and that the SFWA boycott is finally making deep inroads into your inventory of stories, or that perhaps Barry is not a member of that organization or at any rate in sympathy with the boycott.

I think the boycott is affecting the quality of both AMAZING and FANTASTIC. The shortage of big name (Read: quality) is becoming noticeable. I realize that the boycott is not the sole problem here, I know that the publisher is not willing to pay at a competetive rate so that you don't get firstrate submissions as a rule anyway. If you think it will help, show him this letter. Tell him that I buy both magazines at the newstand, paying the full shot, I have been doing so for years and I am sick and tired of paying good money for an inferior product and will no longer continue to do so. In a time that the fantasy/sf field is undergoing its most sudden influx of new readers in years, the old readers are being alienated by slipshod work and excessive hype. Need I point to the successful newer entries to the field of magazine publishing to show that the quality publications are the ones showing the most dramatic growth?

I realize that not *all* the outstanding writers are SFWA members (I would guesstimate that half or fewer of the full-time writers who make a living at fantasy or sf are active in the organization). But the role of the editor is to guide the some-times misdirected energies of the young writers in the direction of quality work in the art of *story-telling*; it is equally the editor's task to inform established writers that a name and half-worked setting-sketches are a dime a dozen. You do deal in stories after all.

I've had my say, and overall it has seemed too negative. I must apologize for that; I know you are overworked in your position and it is made no easier by the economic difficulties of a shoe string budget. Enclosed there is a self-addressed envelope, stamped, which I hope you will feel like using. I do not expect a reply, but I think that I must give you a fair opportunity to tell me to kiss off if the mood strikes you, considering the unfortunate tone of the letter. I do understand that time pressures will probably preclude a reply, but thanks at least for reading this far. Yours in dreams,

WEINER J. SMITH
30 South Pk.
Leicester, N.Y. 14451

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I appreciate the thought and concern which went into your letter, Weiner, but I wish you'd take the time to reconsider some of what you've read. I regarded John Shirley's story as one of the best he's written, for instance, and Peter Andrews' short-short had a very definite point. Likewise, I don't acknowledge "poor judgment" in regards to the Malzberg & Pronzini story, which was one I personally enjoyed quite a bit. It seems to me that, especially in the case of the first two stories, you have read hastily, looking for an easy story to jump out at you. But Shirley and Andrews were being rather subtle: the "point" of each story exists by implication and requires some participation on your part to be discerned. A larger point is this: FANTASTIC *does not reflect a single viewpoint or attitude towards fantasy. That there are many forms and types of fantasy is obvious, but each author brings a specific and particular approach and attitude to bear upon a fantasy story. Some tell warm-hearted tales about magic and adventure. Others comment, perhaps eliptically, on aspects of the human condition. Yet others concern themselves with aspects of surrealism. Often an author blends these various approaches in a given work. The range is broad, and I try to convey as much of this variety of approach in every issue as I can. Consequently, no story will be to every reader's taste, but I hope that in each issue readers can find at least a few outstanding or memorable stories, no matter what a reader's taste in fantasy may be. The* SFWA *boycott has had no noticeable effect upon the material we receive or publish, I might add; I'm uncertain about whether in fact it still exists.* —TW

Dear Mr. White:

Reading the announcement of your new schedule triggered an uncharacteristic spell of nostalgia. I flashed back through time and space to Meridian, MS, and the hot summer of '76. An undergraduate plastics research project had fallen through at the last minute and jobs of the paying sort just weren't around. I spent the days in a porch/balcony overlooking 12th St. sitting on my duff, sipping iced tea from a pewter mug and reading *Dune*. It was huge, but it didn't take all summer.

On that fateful day I was forced to walk six bubbling-tar blocks to Brown's Newstand for a replacement. Nothing looked interesting, but I wasn't about to admit that that trip was futile. I stepped to the magazine racks and there, perched defiantly between *F&SF* and *Galaxy*, was the May FANTASTIC.

It flashed an enticing Hickman cover at me, but I was suspicious. Sword & Sorcery had somehow associated itself (in my mind, anyway) with horror comics and the old Chop-up-a-pretty-girl-to-get-the-young-psychos-off approach, and I had seen too much fantasy art associated with too much shit to be trusting. I almost didn't get past the gory Olsen illo on page seven, but then there was that gorgeous Fabian for G.R.R. Martin's "The Lonely Songs of Laren Dorr" on forty-five. Back and forth it went, but optimism won out. I pulled the reluctant buck from my graduation tri-fold and went totally weird for the next twenty-four hours.

As Fate and Murphy would have it, that was the last issue of the bi-monthly schedule, and three months of limbo hurts a lot. Thanks, Ghod, and you, too, Ted.

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FANTASTIC was my first genre magazine. *Analog* was available where I grew up, but it was always next to *Science Digest* and I couldn't get the two separated. Jeez, it looked like a textbook and I had enough of those, and who had money, anyway? FANTASTIC came along when the interest and the bread coincided, and I will cheer it on till death do us in.

Enough sentimental garbage (too much, actually), what I'm here to say is that Parke Godwin has done it again. It is a pleasure to see a writer with L. Sprague de Camp's style and wit without his viewpoint. It's about time the 'Little People' received (ahem!) a little respect. Philosophy aside, he gracefully walks the line between flowing, natural-sounding archaic speech and stuffy, over-formal dialogue without crossing over any appreciable amount of time. Not easy, not at all, and yes, I'm in a position to know.

"The Chill of Distant Laughter" is a fine old-fashioned story with a nice treatment. I'm having our phone taken out.

"The Journal of Nathaniel Worth" took a bit too long to get where it was going, but was interesting enough when it did. I guess the prose style was necessary for the mood Mr. Young was setting, but more modern forms have spoiled me. Mr. Fabian's cover was great, but I can't say anything about it that my wife wouldn't consider sexist, so I won't. Paranoia . . .

The rest— Oh, hell, it was a great issue and I liked everything. Maybe I'm getting mellow in my old age.

There was one other thing outstanding about the July issue. Now, what was it . . . Oh yea, Fritz Leiber's back.

It sounds so casual, you know? Fritz is back. I'm sure there was a time when I didn't adore his work, but my subconscious has mercifully blotted it out. He is one of the finest writers in this field or any other you care to mention, and his presence in FANTASTIC is a plus above and beyond the pull of his name on the contents page. You must be doing something right.

Finally, a minor explanation. The reason my outburst went to the April FANTASTIC rather than *Galaxy* was because *Galaxy* inspired it only in the sense that that last sprig of hay flattened the dromedary. Sure, pigeonholing is pointless, but when other people set them up only to ignore them repeatedly it provoked a look at the whole schtick. I mean, why bother? But I'm over it now. Rational from now on, that's me. I never said coherent.

Once more, congratulations on your new schedule and I'm looking forward (please, God?) to a long and beautiful friendship.

RICHARD PARKS
1611 11th St. S.E.
Dectur, AL 35601

Fantasia (cont. from page 120)

paintings, but there is no denying the power and impact that electrifies his vision. This book deserves to be sought out and purchased, so much so that if you think you cannot afford it, eat a bit less for a few weeks. I think it's worth it.

—LOU STATHIS

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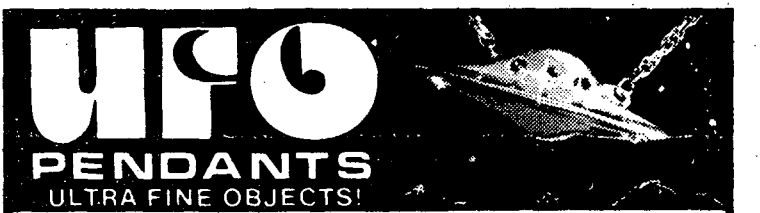

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A Sense of Diaster (cont. from page 61)

clude everything checkable. Soon now, he would find out if that was enough.

Little Tod, meanwhile, looking first at the glowing screen, and then at his father, suddenly had a look of comprehension.

"I get," he said sturdily. *"—Only not put cat in verter."*

Igor smiled.

"That's the spirit, Kid!"

—CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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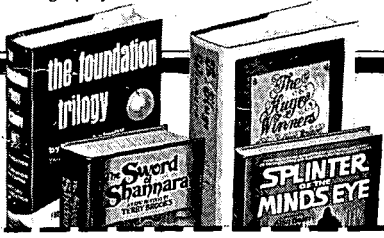

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